Beliefs about Disability, Race, and Culture of Urban Special Education Teachers and Their Retention Decisions

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how beliefs about disability, race, and culture influence the retention of special education teachers in an urban school district. Using a multiple case study methodology, five special education teachers currently working in an urban school district were selected to participate in a series of interviews, and to compose bi-weekly journal reflections on their beliefs and rationales for continuing to teach in an urban district. Transcriptions of data were coded and analyzed for descriptions which highlighted individual and intersectional beliefs about disability, race, and culture, and ways in which they reflected rationales for continuing to teach special education in an urban district. Implications for teacher education programs, systems of teacher support, and professional development are discussed.

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Chapter 1

"Teaching, like love, is high risk behavior"
-Dr. Jeffery Duncan Andrade

The art of being a teacher in the highly volatile political and economic climate of today

comes with high levels of risk. Similar to a lover professing their feelings for the first time,

teachers who choose to work in the challenging context that is urban public education in the

United States put their hearts and minds on the line for the love of their students. Indeed, being a

teacher in the urban context comes with its own level of emotional risk (Duncan-Andrade, 2007).

Within urban schools and districts across the United States, is a subset of individuals who face

issues such as high turnover rate, poor working conditions, and burdensome paperwork, among

other concerns (Billingsley, 2004). These individuals are special education teachers. Despite

these pitfalls, some choose to continue teaching in urban classrooms, working with students with

disabilities from low-income, non-dominant backgrounds. This dissertation examines why some

special education teachers decide to stay in an urban school district while others leave.

Problem Statement

The attrition of teachers is a general problem faced by schools across the United States

(Darling-Hammond, 2010). Vacancies in public schools and classrooms have repercussions for

students such as the creation of instability and lack of continuity towards educational goals and

achievement. This is a particularly pressing issue in urban school districts, where turnover of

teachers and vacancies are much higher than the average suburban school (Billingsley, 2007).

Math, science and special education teachers are among those most likely to depart from

teaching (Ingersoll, 2001). Although special education and general education teachers both tend

to leave teaching in urban districts at high rates, special education teachers are more likely to

transfer from special education into another area of teaching (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2006).

Additionally, for teachers who hold dual certification in special education and general education, few desire to use their certification solely to work in special education classrooms (Carlson & Billingsley, 2001).

Billingsley (2007) found that retention of special education teachers in an urban district was dependent upon initiatives such as induction programs, improved working conditions, and opportunities to transfer into other schools when these teachers were dissatisfied with their current placements. Additionally, Billingsley placed the onus of special education teacher retention in an urban district on leadership and administration. Therefore, much of the research examining special education teacher retention focuses on administration and improving external working conditions rather than special education teachers' individual characteristics and beliefs.

Previous research on the attrition of special education teachers suggests that there are specific characteristics of teachers who decide to leave the field and/or district. These special education teachers (a) are generally younger, (b) usually have less than four to five years of teaching experience, (c) typically have taught students with learning disabilities and/or emotional behavioral disorders, and (d) often are from racially dominant backgrounds, as opposed to minorities (Billingsley, Pyecha, Smith-Davis, Murray, & Hendricks, 1995; Borman & Dowling, 2008). Each of these facets of the issue of teacher attrition is addressed in detail in the following sections.

Statement of Purpose

Given the paucity of information about factors influencing special education teachers' retention and attrition, more research is needed to begin to understand what specific factors motivate these teachers' decisions about whether to continue teaching in urban school districts where rates of attrition are typically higher (Billingsley, 2004). The purpose of this study is to

add to the knowledge base by examining the reasons for remaining in or leaving an urban district as a special education teacher. Specifically, this study focused on uncovering teacher beliefs about disability, race, and culture in an effort to understand how these influenced retention decisions. More precisely, the study identified the relationship between retention decisions and teacher beliefs.

Research Questions

To accomplish the purpose of this study, three main research questions were addressed.

1. How do special education teachers explain their reasons for remaining in or leaving an urban district?

2. What are the key sources of special education teachers beliefs about disability, race, and culture?

3. How do beliefs about disability, race, and culture intersect to inform special education teacher retention in a large urban district?

Supporting Definitions

Several key terms were used in this study: attrition, retention, special education teacher and urban school district. Although these terms may appear to be straight forward, the definitions can be variably interpreted. As a result, for purposes of this research, they were precisely defined to ensure the scope and focus of the research was clear.

Attrition: What It Means to Leave

Grismer and Kirby (1987) claim that there is more than one way to define teacher attrition. Indeed, studies have identified several definitions for attrition (Billingsley, 2007). Attrition may include "teaching-field transfers" (Boe, 1990) in which individuals stay within the school or district but transfer to a different field of teaching (e.g., special education to general

education). These transfers are considered attrition because they result in the loss of special

education teachers (Billingsley, 1993). Attrition also includes "exit-attrition," special education

teachers who exit the teaching profession (Haggstrom, Darling Hammond, & Grismer, 1988).

Within exit-attrition, there are three main categories: (1) exit to nonteaching roles (e.g., moving

from a special education teacher to an administrator or school psychologist), (2) exit to

retirement, and (3) exit to other employment (Haggstrom et al., 1988). As seen in Figure 1,

Billingsley (1993) delineates "transfer attrition," refines "exit to other employment," and adds

other "exit-attrition" categories: homemaking, non-teaching employment, return to school,

unemployment and seeking work, and other (death or military service).

Figure 1. Special education attrition and retention factors and sub-factors
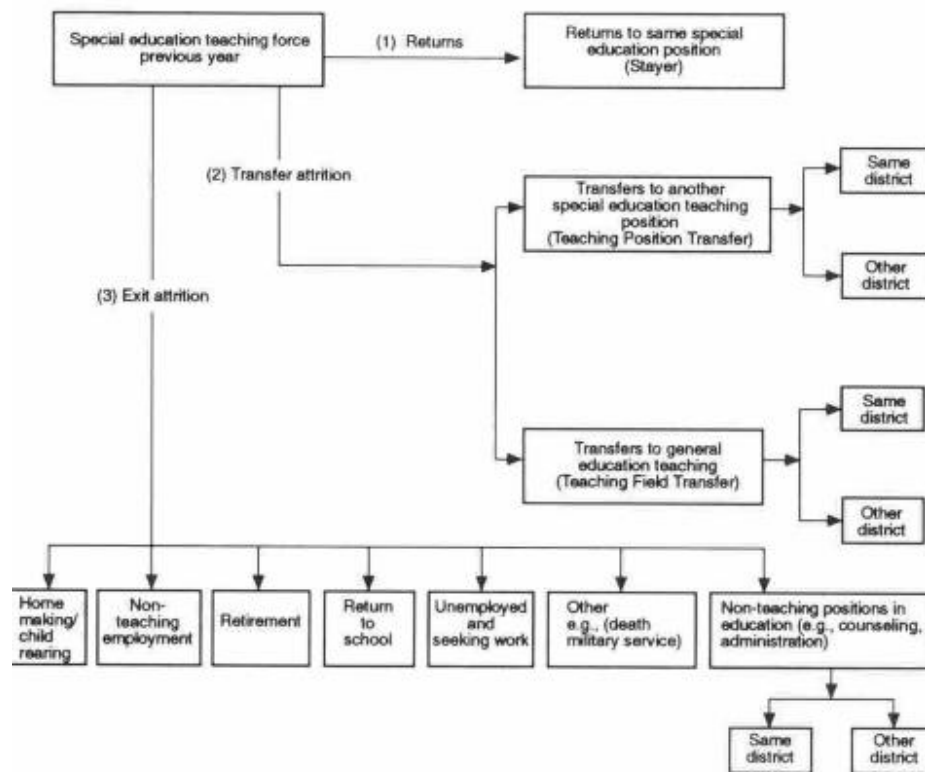
(Billingsley, 1993)

Retention: What It Means to Stay

Although attrition has several definitions, retention is more straightforward. Special

education teachers, who were retained, for the purposes of this study, were defined as follows:

(a) staying within the teaching assignment as a special education teacher; (b) staying within the

same school, but a different classroom, as a special education teacher; or (c) staying within the

same district, but different school and classroom, as a special education teacher.

Special Education Teacher

The National Educational Association (2002) defines highly qualified special education

teachers as individuals who have (a) special education certification or a license, and at least a

bachelor's degree; (b) meet requirements of an elementary education teacher, including the

passing of a multiple subjects exam; and (c) highly qualified status in a core subject, such as

math or science, for those individuals who are teaching multiple subjects.

The special education teacher works to coordinate services and supports to ensure that the

student with disabilities meets IEP goals by the subsequent annual review period. Consequently,

special education teachers have to multi-task on a daily basis. In urban school districts, the roles

of a special education teacher may move beyond coordinating services and case management to

scheduling meetings, implementing complex behavioral plans, serving on multiple school

committees, and advocating for important supports and services for their students (Billingsley,

2007).

Urban School District

Traditionally in literature and popular media, there have been three major ways in which

urban has been conceptualized: (1) as a place of sophistication, (2) as a space in which people of

color are traditionally found, and (3) as a disorganized space marked by high rates of crime and

poverty (Leonardo & Hunter, 2007).   For the most part, the latter two invoke the traditional conceptualization of an urban school district, yet with the advent of gentrification and the development of new businesses in disadvantaged neighborhoods, as well as the forcing out of poor communities, the former definition is beginning to take hold (Posey-Maddox, 2014).

Jacob (2007), in his description of urban schools, mentions that urban schools districts are traditionally found in larger cities, include a larger number of schools and students served than suburban or rural districts, and are required, therefore to make larger per pupil expenditures for resources. Using data from the School and Staffing Survey of 2003-2004, Jacob explains that urban school districts also include higher numbers of students from minority backgrounds and English language learners. On average, students in urban school districts have higher rates of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch rates, and score lower on national achievement tests as compared to students in suburban districts (Jacob).

Although per pupil expenditures make it easier for urban districts to obtain discounted rates on items such as computers and pencils for students, the eroding tax base in urban areas makes these districts much more financially dependent on state and federal funds (Jacob, 2007). Furthermore, with high numbers of students and increasing crime and poverty, these districts do not attract a large number of teachers. Therefore, understaffing in urban school districts is also an increasing problem (Billingsley, 2007). Additionally, it is important to note that urban schools face steady declines in enrollment. This is partly due to competing with nearby private or charter schools. In some cases, such a decline in enrollment leads to school closings, as was the case in Chicago, Illinois early in 2013 (Gutstein & Lipman, 2013).

Finally, for teachers of students with disabilities who attend urban schools, there may be additional financial and staffing challenges. These include, but are not limited to, lack of trained

paraprofessionals to support students with disabilities; a limited number of service providers, who have large caseloads; and limited technology resources such as computers or assistive devices for students. Therefore, there are additional challenges associated with working in urban school districts for special education teachers.

While Jacob (2007) and Billingsley (2007) use these traditional definitions for urban districts, Posey-Maddox (2014) complicates the story of the urban district. Posey-Maddox (2014) writes that

> Dominant framings of urban public schools are not entirely inaccurate, as high teacher turnover, racial segregation, concentrated poverty, and insufficient material resources are all issues that still affect many city public schools. Yet demographic shifts linked to gentrification, rising economic inequality, immigration, and residential preferences have complicated dominant conceptions of "urban" and "suburban" populations and issues, promoting the need for new ways of conceptualizing urban education. (Posey-Maddox, p. 436)

Consequently, there is an impetus to understand and be critical of traditionally conceived notions of what an urban district is and historically how it has become associated with students of color from low-income backgrounds. Without a critical eye towards urban education and how it has been framed in dominant special education literature, there is a risk of perpetuating traditional patterns of inequity (Posey-Maddox, 2014). Therefore, in this dissertation study, it was important to understand special education teacher participants' beliefs about what it means/meant to work in a district categorized as "urban" and how this shaped their intersecting beliefs about disability, race, and culture within this context.

Significance of the Problem

Lisa Delpit (1995) writes "We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs" (p. 46). In general, beliefs shape our values, our ideas, and our practices. Because beliefs and practices are interrelated (Lavigne, 2010), it is important to understand the role of beliefs as they contribute to behaviors, practices, and decisions. Some research on beliefs, as they relate to retention of teachers, has been inconclusive (Billingsley, 2004); yet this does not meant that these beliefs are unimportant in understanding decisions about whether to continue teaching special education. Research related to teachers' cultural competency often recommends that teachers examine their own beliefs, values, and biases as a first step in working with diverse learners (Green, 2010; Lindsey, Robbins, & Terrell, 2003). This study looks at how some of these individual beliefs inform retention. It attempted to move beyond surface level factors such as stress and job dissatisfaction as well as the traditional focus of literature on administration influencing the retention of special education teachers, to the beliefs that undergird all of these factors and ideas.

Especially in urban schools, where there are high turnover rates for special education teachers (Ingersoll, 2001), research on beliefs and the connection to retention becomes both a scholarly contribution and a practical need. Therefore, this research (a) contributes to the scholarly work around teacher retention and attrition in special education in general; (b) begins the exploration of the influences of teacher beliefs about disability, race, and culture on special educator retention; (c) contributes to the scholarly work around special education and urban school districts; and (d) highlights the practical needs and concerns of special education teachers through study implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine how beliefs about disability, race, and culture influence special education teachers' decisions about whether to continue to teach in an urban school district. Several topics are important to the study of urban special education teacher retention. The major topics that are covered in this literature review include general and special education attrition and retention; special education teacher beliefs about disability, race, and culture; and frameworks for knowledge construction in special education. This chapter also includes an identification of gaps in the literature, and, when appropriate, synthesis and implications. The conclusion addresses the implications of gaps in the literature for further study in the area of urban special education and teacher retention, thus creating a justification for the current study.

General Attrition and Retention

In the early 1990's, the general attrition rate of teachers in the United States was around 14% (Ingersoll, 2001). Recent literature indicates that urban schools have challenges in retaining all types of teachers (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wykoff, 2007; Sass, Seal, & Martin, 2011). Specifically, teachers in these districts are more likely to leave and shortages are greater overall due to difficult working conditions and fewer resources (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Schools in which teacher turnover is greater are usually continuously replacing teachers and have many who have not yet reached the "3-year mark" (Eckert, 2013; Mandlwitz, 2003).

State and local agencies are being asked to create solutions to teacher shortages in general as well as special education (McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004). Many of the ideas such as incentivized teaching created by state and local agencies, have not yet been thoroughly researched as effective (Hirsch, 2001). Additionally, it is clear that these programs are costly, as many of them directly involve financial commitments such as teaching through loan forgiveness

programs or offering financial bonuses for entering the field of teaching (McLeskey, Tyler, & Flippin, 2004).

In order to examine factors that influenced the attrition of teachers during the 1990s, Kelly (2004) used an event history analysis method. He gathered data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS, 1991-1992) and the 1992 Teacher Follow-Up Survey. His analysis revealed several important school-level and district-level factors which contributed to the attrition of teachers. These factors included teacher salary, socially disadvantaged schools [sic], individual teacher factors (e.g., race or gender), preparation to teach, and specific subject taught. Through the SASS and Teacher Follow-Up Surveys, Kelly found that school and district level factors on attrition were much weaker than individual teacher factors. For example, the influence of school size on teacher attrition was found to be less significant than a teacher's age. Therefore, while the research by Kelly did not take into account all school-level and individual-level factors, the surveys did indicate that more research is needed on individual factors influencing teachers' decisions to continue or leave teaching.

Eckert (2013) used quantitative analysis to examine the relationship between teacher retention and highly qualified teaching status among first year teachers in urban districts. Surprisingly, no relationship was found among first year teachers and highly qualified teaching status; however, teacher self-efficacy was highly correlated. In other words, teachers who felt confident about their abilities to work in urban districts were also confident that they could overcome the external influences found in urban schools. The authors indicated that strong beliefs in student success and self-efficacy influenced retention, but that it is just one among many factors that may be important (Eckert).

Shen (1997) reinforced the idea that there are multiple factors which influence retention and attrition. He suggested that most literature on teacher retention in public schools either focuses on theoretical and/or multivariate rationales for remaining in teaching, or posits a bivariate relationship between attrition and retention and another variable (Shen, 1997). Research which falls into the former category examines theories such as human capital theory (Grismer & Kirby, 1987) and social learning theory (Chapman & Green, 1986). Research which addresses bivariate relationships between attrition and retention includes an examination of factors such as gender, ethnicity, salary, and subject specialization (Murnane, Singer, & Willet, 1989).

Murnane et al. (1989) provided more information about how personal characteristics influenced retention and attrition among teachers. They found that teacher attrition, as a whole, was higher in the first few years of teaching; mature women stayed more often than younger women; men stayed more than women overall; teachers working in urban schools tended to leave sooner; and, after controlling for district differences, black teachers tended to stay longer than white teachers. The bivariate approach utilized by Murnane and colleagues was most commonly applied to studies of teacher retention in the 1980s and 1990s (Shen, 1997). Additional research on variables influencing the attrition and retention of teachers suggested that experience, age, and race can also be important individual factors (Bowman & Dowling, 2008; Grismer & Kirby, 1991; Ingersoll, 2003; Lavigne, 2010).

When compared with young teachers, teachers who are older are less likely to leave the profession (Borman & Dowling, 2008) and less likely to move to other districts (Boe, Bobbit, Cook, Whitener, & Weber, 1997). Several factors may contribute to the higher rates of younger teachers choosing to leave the field of teaching. To begin with, younger teachers tend to have

fewer financial burdens and more opportunities for upward mobility (Billingsley, 2004). These teachers may not see teaching as a permanent career, and choose to go into higher paying professions. This idea was reiterated by Guarino, Santibanez and Daley (2006), who explained that there is an opportunity cost associated with teaching, and younger teachers may have more opportunities outside of teaching than older teachers. Teacher age may also intersect with gender and personal factors, such as desire to have a family. Some female teachers under the age of 30 may want to have families and leave the profession due to personal factors such as desire to start families (Grismer & Kirby, 1991). Wayne (2000) maintained that many young teachers leave the profession because of family and personal characteristics rather than job dissatisfaction. However, choosing between family and career was more common a decade ago than it may be today (Borman & Dowling, 2008). As a result, other factors associated with age may also be contributing to the attrition differences between younger teachers and older teachers.

The age of teachers who choose to leave or move from current teaching positions is one factor which may be important with regards to attrition; however, age can also be coupled with years of experience. Indeed, experience in teaching matters in terms of knowledge and capital (Grismer & Kirby, 1991). Teachers who feel more confident about the knowledge they possess tend to stay and utilize it. This is born out in the attrition data for teachers. Teachers within their first five years of teaching were 1.57 times more likely to leave the profession than teachers with over five years of experience (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Put another way, about 45% of teachers left within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2003). In addition to knowledge and experience, however, there are particular special education placements in which there are higher rates of attrition.

Indeed, many White pre-service teachers lack a detailed understanding of institutionalized racism and how it continues to be perpetuated in the distribution of resources in American schools (Sleeter, 2008). Teachers' personal experiences with schooling may also create a dissonance between expectations for and the abilities of students of color (Jordan, 2008). Although it is known that white teachers tend to leave classrooms more often than teachers from non-dominant backgrounds (Billingsley, 2004), few studies have closely examined the beliefs that undergird these racial and/or cultural differences (Lavigne, 2010).

Furthermore, while previous research has examined factors influencing the attrition of general and special education teachers, few studies have specifically examined how teacher beliefs contribute to decisions about whether to continue to teach (Miller et al. 1999; Billingsley et al. 1995; Westling and Whitten, 1996; Lavigne, 2010). Consequently, there is no research which specifically identifies whether or not attrition and retention decisions are influenced by teacher beliefs about disability, race, and culture or the intersection these beliefs.

By contrast, Grismer and Kirby (1987) suggested that individual teachers make decisions about staying or leaving a district based on costs and benefits. They went further, however, to suggest that there are two kinds of human capital[1] which influenced staying or leaving the field of teaching: general and specific. They argued that the more specific human capital a person had, the lower the chances of leaving the field of teaching. This explained, in part, why younger teachers tended to leave the field more quickly than older teachers. Younger teachers tended to have less control over their job circumstances or ability to advocate for resources or ideas and therefore, had less specific human capital in teaching. Consequently, this was one of the reasons found why younger teachers tend to leave the field of teaching more frequently.

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[1]The economic measure of an employee's skill set.

Guarino et al. (2006), also explained that the principle driving the supply of teachers in the United States was opportunity cost. Teachers conducted their own assessment of "comparison level of alternatives" (p. 201) by comparing teaching with other job opportunities which offered better salary and benefits. Underlying was the idea that the decision to continue or leave teaching was related to how the teacher perceived his/her position in relation to other opportunities. While the idea of opportunity cost is tied into salary and job prospects, which are both more external factors, the authors concluded that more qualitative studies were needed to substantiate these claims, and examine how specific policies and accountability measures influence attrition and retention.

Therefore, the attrition of teachers is an issue faced within the overall field of education and teaching. Similar rationales for attrition and retention can be found among the subset of special education teachers. The next section discusses the literature related to the attrition and retention of special education teachers as well as areas for further research.

Special Education Attrition and Retention

Data from the U.S. Department of Education indicated that the shortage of special education teachers increased from 1% in 2000, to 11.4% in 2003, or approximately 7,532 teachers (USDOE, 2003). Consequently, there continues to be a shortage of qualified teachers across the field of special education (AAEE, 2000). The number of special education teachers leaving the field each year creates a number of problems: (1) a large amount of money goes towards the recruitment of new teachers to fill existing vacancies, particularly by public school administrators; (2) typically, special education teachers who fill existing vacancies are less qualified to teach; and (3) transitioning and inducting new teachers into current vacancies creates a lot of disruption to student learning until the new teachers are fully functioning staff members

of the school community (Boe et al., 1997). The third point is particularly troubling given that students in special education can remain on the caseload of a special education teacher for several years and turnover can lead to a disruption in progress towards academic and functional goals.

Silent Criss (2004) found that about 98% of the largest urban school districts had significant teacher shortages in special education. Many urban districts are also forced to use long-term substitutes to fill extended vacancies in special education. Mandlawitz (2003) found that one such large, urban district had to hire about 100 long term substitutes to fill a vacancy. That same district saw about 40-50% of special education teachers leave at the end of their third year.

Billingsley (2005) suggested that there are multiple and sometimes interacting factors that contribute to special education teacher attrition issues. Factors such as high caseloads, lots of paperwork, insufficient time to plan, inadequate leadership, and lack of resources are just a few that may interact to contribute to special education teacher retention (Billingsley et al., 1995). Overall, Billingsley (1993) divided factors influencing special education teacher retention into the categories of personal factors, such as demographic variables; external factors, such as caseload; employment factors, such as salary; affective variables such as investment in students and community; and career decisions, including opportunity costs.

Personal factors such as demographic variables, family decisions are important to gain an overall understanding of what motivates special education teachers' decisions about whether to continue teaching. Although not always in the control of districts and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), these variables provide a context for policymakers and researchers to understand what motivates special education teacher attrition (Billingsley, 1993).

Singh and Billingsley (1996) found that teacher race was associated with the retention decisions of teachers of students with EBD, where non-white teachers expressed a lower intent to stay in teaching special education than white teachers. However, more recent reports from both special and general education studies indicate that white teachers tend to leave urban districts at a higher rate than non-white teachers (Billingsley, 2004).

For example, Borman and Dowling (2008) examined 12 studies which compared the attrition of White and non-white teachers in urban public schools. They gathered an odds ratio suggesting that White teachers were 1.36 times more likely to leave teaching than non-White teachers. Boe et al. (1997) also reported that white teachers, who make up the majority of the pool of special education teachers in the United States, were more likely to leave their placements in urban districts than their minority counterparts. They suggested that this is, in part, due to white teachers' beliefs about schooling and the education of culturally, linguistically diverse students (Boe et al., 1997).

Several studies of the attrition of special education teachers suggest that less experienced teachers tend to leave teaching more often than do experienced teachers (Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Billingsley, 2004; Guarino et al., 2006). Experienced teachers are better at seeking out resources in challenging situations and are therefore able to gather the necessary support to continue teaching (Billingsley, 2004). In fact, Billingsley (1993) found that years of teaching experience was coupled with teacher agency.

McLeskey, et al. (2004) reported that in the states of California, Colorado, New York, Hawaii, Louisiana, and Delaware, the numbers of uncertified special education teachers ranged from 20-30% of all special education teachers employed by districts in those states. Although the majority of special education teachers hold Bachelor's and Master's degrees in teaching, as of

2002, about 7% enter the field through alternative certification programs, and this number is on the rise (Carlson, Chen, Schroll, & Klein, 2002). It is known that pre-service teachers from high quality teacher preparation programs are better prepared to handle job expectations and accommodate the needs of diverse learners than less qualified or alternatively certified individuals (Carlson et al., 2002). Billingsley (2005) suggested that administrators and leaders consider actively recruiting and screening applicants for highly qualified status, thus providing schools with more long-term and effective special education teachers. Findings suggest that highly qualified, well-prepared special education teachers tend to stay in the field longer (Billingsley, 2007). Additionally, finding highly qualified and experienced educators also supports an easier transition within special education teacher vacancies (Billingsley, 2005).

Additionally, special education teachers may feel a sense of isolation in school communities due to their specialized roles and unique programs (Billingsley, 2005). Furthermore, special education teachers may experience issues related to defining their roles within a classroom or school community (Billingsley, 2004) and also experience stress and burnout due to the intensity of the job (Cross & Billingsley, 1994). Specifically, this means that special education teachers sometimes play multiple roles within a given school, such as instructional assistant, service implementer, co-teacher, etc. Overall, it is clear that attrition is an issue in special education that leads to costs in time, money, and resources (Billingsley, 2005). Additional studies of special education attrition underscore the need to find lasting solutions to attrition and increase retention efforts in special education.

Although Billingsley (2004) suggested that no concrete conclusions could be drawn about special education teacher retention across specific service delivery placements, the disability label of the students taught appears to be related to attrition. Early studies suggested

that attrition for teachers who worked with students with emotional/behavioral disabilities (EBD), in general, was higher than for teachers of students with learning disabilities or cognitive disabilities (Singer, 1993a). In fact, the area of EBD has a greater shortage of teachers than all other areas combined (AAEE, 2000). Additionally, George, George, Gersten and Grosenick (1995) found that teachers who worked in segregated settings with students with EBD tended to leave more often than those who worked in resource rooms or more integrated settings. However, teachers who worked with students with EBD tended to continue teaching only when they had adequate support (Billingsley).

In an early attempt to understand what influenced the retention of EBD teachers, Singh and Billingsley (1996) examined differences in retention among 159 special education teachers of students with EBD and 499 special education teachers from other disability categories/areas. They found that special education teachers of students with EBD who had more teaching experiences, fewer outside opportunities, greater support from their administration, and fewer issues related to defining their classroom role were more likely to stay in their current teaching positions. Although these areas were seen to be major issues among special education teachers of students with EBD, they were also concerns of special education teachers in general (Singh & Billingsley).   Therefore, placement and associated stressors can also lead to special education teacher attrition.

In addition, much of the responsibility for special education teacher retention and attrition is focused primarily on overall job satisfaction and levels of stress associated with structural factors such as caseload, administrative support, and resource allocation (Billingsley, 2004). The current literature does not, however, examine how factors such as stress and job satisfaction may also be linked to teacher beliefs and how beliefs may influence overall satisfaction and retention.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, there are different kinds of special education attrition (Billingsley, 2007). Of the special education teachers who fell into the "leavers" category, this study focused specifically on those who (a) left the urban district of interest to teach in another district, (b) left the field of special education to teach general education, or (c) left the field altogether for another career or to retire (see Figure 1).

In urban school districts not only is there a problem of attracting highly qualified teachers, but also of retaining them (Billingsley, 2005). As mentioned above, special education teachers leave for a variety of reasons including personal circumstances and factors, inexperience, poor working conditions, lack of support, inadequate professional development, role-related issues, caseload, service-delivery, lack of resources, stress, job dissatisfaction, and overall commitment (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley 2004; Billingsley, 2005). For a brief description of each of these reasons for special education attrition, see Figure 1.

Brownell, Smith, McNellis and Miller (1997) conducted phone interviews with 93 randomly selected special education teachers from Florida who had left the profession. The interviews focused on identifying why these special education teachers chose to leave the classroom, what their employment status was after leaving, and any other future career plans that they might have had. The authors separated special education teachers who left into three main categories: disgruntled leavers, non-disgruntled leavers, and unable to discern.

Among the disgruntled leavers, special education teachers reported that they felt unsupported, under prepared for the teaching assignment they were given, overwhelmed by the students they had to serve, disempowered, or a combination of all of those factors (Brownell et al., 1997). Among the non-disgruntled leavers, special education teachers reported that they enjoyed teaching in the field of special education but left due to other reasons such as other job

opportunities, family issues, retirement, certification requirements, or not being offered

reappointment (Brownell et al.). Some alternatively certified individuals, who enjoyed working

in the field of special education, also reported frustration with certification requirements and

legal restrictions. Finally, in the category of unable to discern, the authors were unable to

understand what specific reasons lead some of the special education teachers to leave and, for

those who were not reappointed, how they felt about having to leave teaching special education.

Overall, the study found that the majority of the 93 special education teachers left due to

dissatisfaction with their working conditions. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents

ended up staying in education in some other capacity such as teaching in general education

(Brownell et al., 1997). The study by Brownell et al. created a distinction between those who

left for dissatisfaction with the field or working conditions and those who left for other

opportunities and personal reasons, citing that those who were non-disgruntled had more

potential to return to the field in the future than those who were disgruntled.

In 1992, Singer completed a longitudinal study of 6600 special education teachers from

Michigan and North Carolina examining the overall career paths of these teachers. She found

that beginning special education teachers in these two states taught for an average of 7 years

(Singer, 1992). She also found that young female teachers tended to be at the greatest risk for

attrition. Similarly, also at risk of attrition, are special education teachers who tend to have

higher national standardized test scores and those who work with students as related support

service providers before changing careers to special education. Both of these last risk factors for

attrition may have to do with opportunity cost of staying in teaching special education. Special

education teachers who have higher standardized test scores and who have opportunities to work

in professions with better pay and prestige tend to leave the profession at a greater rate (Singer, 1992).

Previous research about special education teacher retention suggests that more experienced teachers, in terms of age and years teaching, tend to continue working in their classrooms as opposed to younger and less experienced counterparts (Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Morvant & Gersten, 1995; Singh & Billingsley, 1996). Additionally, factors such as perceived preparedness, type of certification, and work environments also affect whether teachers continue working in the field of special education (Billingsley, 2004). Using a path diagram, Gersten, Keating, and Yovanoff (2001) examined several factors that influenced intent to stay within a district. These included role dissonance, position satisfaction, support from principals and other teachers, stress related to job design, commitment to the profession, years of teaching special education, and central office support. Gersten et al (2001) found that factors such as building support from principals and teachers had a strong effect on working conditions.

Retaining Special Education Teachers

Given these factors which influence retention and attrition, it is important to examine ways of retaining special education teachers. Billingsley (2004) indicated that retention should come in the form of reducing caseloads/stress levels and supporting special education teachers through community building efforts and building up a knowledge base to support these teachers. These ideas were also reiterated by other researchers studying the retention of teachers in general (e.g., Billingsley, 2007; Borman & Dowling, 2008; Brownell & Smith, 1993). Consequently, there are several ways in which districts attempt to retain special education teachers. Some of the areas which hold promise include improving working conditions, providing mentorship and

induction programs, honoring transfers, professional development, and keeping track of teachers who leave.

Improving Working Conditions

Billingsley (2007) suggested that efforts to improve working conditions of teachers are an important part of retention. Improving working conditions includes reducing the amount of paperwork that teachers are required to complete independently, providing teachers with more resources to support instruction, reducing caseloads, improving administrative supports, and reviewing behavioral support procedures (Billingsley, 2007). Although each of these areas is under the category of working conditions, individually, they are important support concerns teachers face when deciding to continue teaching in or leave an urban district. Furthermore, resources to support instruction and behavioral support strategies may also come in the form of mentorship and induction programs which support new teachers in navigating the educational context.

Mentoring and Induction Programs

The risks associated with attrition in special education has motivated many public school districts to consider mentoring and induction programs for new teachers (Brownell, Hirsch, & Seo, 2004). Mentoring and induction programs are ways of providing support to new teachers in an effort to retain them. They provide a way to reduce special education teacher stress and help new teachers gain knowledge and skills relevant to their positions (Billingsley, 2005). Additionally, special education teachers who participated in induction programs indicated that they feel more effective in writing IEPs and working with difficult students, feel more positively towards their positions, and were more likely to stay (Billingsley, 2002; Whitaker, 2000).

Several mentoring and induction programs for teachers, including special education teachers, exist in 32 states across the United States. Additionally, the states of California and Connecticut both have state-wide programs for mentoring and induction of general education teachers. In California, the mentoring program is referred to as the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment Program (BTSA). The program works to provide new teachers with an effective transition into teaching by giving them individualized support, an individualized induction plan, and continued assessments and observations throughout teaching to ensure quality instruction (Earley & Ross, 2006). The program assigns new teachers to a veteran teacher mentor, thus also providing the support of an experienced professional.

While long term impact data related to the California and Connecticut programs do not currently exist, nationally, the percentage of teachers who participated in mentoring/induction programs and left teaching after four years was just 15% as compared to 26% for those who did not participate in a mentoring/induction (Livingston &Wirt, 2004). Therefore, mentorship and induction programs appear to influence the retention of general education teachers. Despite the influence of these programs on general education retention, not all fields have seen an improvement.

For example, Billingsley (2007) suggests that special education teachers do not have ample opportunities to participate in these programs, and among those who have, few found the programs satisfactory (Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004). Special education teachers who found their induction programs to be helpful were more likely to indicate success with difficult students (Billingsley et. al., 2004). Overall, the more support special education teachers obtain in the first few years of teaching, the more likely they are to continue teaching in their schools

(Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Thus, induction programs may serve as a critical support component for special education teachers and influence their retention as special education teachers.

Professional Development

While administrators and leadership in districts have very few choices when it comes to the types of pre-service teaching experiences which special education teachers have before they come into the classroom, they do have the ability to provide meaningful professional development. Typically, professional development in public school settings is very hands-off, where special education teachers have little input into what kinds of development in which to participate (Billingsley, 2005). By contrast, effective professional development is linked to self-efficacy and overall effectiveness of teachers (Hawley & Valli, 1999). This includes components such as shared collaborations between universities and school districts, encouraging teachers to join professional organizations to keep current with research, providing opportunities for teacher leadership within professional development, and encouraging growth through programs such as National Board Certification (Billingsley, 2005).

Honoring Transfers

Taking teacher preferences and experiences into account when making classroom assignments may help administrators in schools hold on to quality teachers. In a study of an urban school district, Billingsley (2007) found that almost 10 percent of the teachers who left explained that they would have stayed if they had options to transfer to another school within the same district. District leaders should create processes for transferring which are systematic and keep data to track who leaves which type of school (e.g., moving from elementary to secondary placements) (Billingsley). Keeping track of school and classroom level transfers within a district can inform leaders about classrooms and schools in need of additional supports. Simply

transferring special education teachers out of difficult classrooms does not directly address the

issues of special education teacher retention. If a classroom experiences constant turnover, for

instance, it may be an indication that teacher needs in that position are not being met and may

suggest that there should be further inquiry about the classroom.

As mentioned briefly in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, research on retention and attrition

of special education teachers by teacher characteristics has yielded some interesting relationships

between demographic variables and intent to stay (Billingsley, 2004). Despite such results,

however, there is still much research needed on how identifying characteristics such as age and

beliefs influence the retention of special education teachers (Miller et al., 1999; Billingsley,

2004). An examination of both retention literature and attrition literature related to special

education teachers in urban districts is needed to fully understand the beliefs and decisions of

this population.

Overall, in examining the literature surrounding special education retention and attrition,

it is important to recognize the abundance of research on both external factors such as caseload

and supports as well as internal factors such as race, gender, and family circumstances. No

studies, however, have examined the role of teacher beliefs in retention. Billingsley (2004) is

perhaps the only study explicitly mentioning a possible link between special education teacher

beliefs and retention decisions; though inconclusive. While several studies have indicated the

need for more qualitative studies (Guarino et al., 2006) highlighting some of the attrition and

retention factors (cite) discussed, and early research discussed the importance of looking at

individual components of decisions to leave special education teaching (Munane et al 1989), to

date there are no other qualitative studies examining the beliefs of special education teachers as

they relate to overall retention. Therefore, this dissertation represented a new line of inquiry in the area of special education teacher retention/attrition.

Teacher Beliefs

Theories and beliefs make up an important part of teachers' general knowledge including how they might perceive, process, and act upon information in the classroom (Clark & Peterson, 1986). Teachers' theories and beliefs represent a rich store of general knowledge which affects their planning, interactive thoughts and decisions, as well as classroom behaviors (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). In addition to informing future actions (Richardson, 2003), beliefs about teaching also come from a variety of sources including personal experiences with schooling, and experiences with formal knowledge (Richardson, 1996).   Research in the field of teacher education has shifted from an emphasis on teacher behavior related to student achievement to a focus on thinking about teacher beliefs, planning, and decision making processes (Fang, 1996).

Lavigne (2011) explained that teacher beliefs of novice teachers and experienced teachers tend to differ. She collected data on first year and third, fourth and fifth year teachers. She found that novice teachers tend to focus on their own behaviors and experienced teachers tend to focus on the behaviors of students in the classroom. Eckert (2013) also highlighted the importance of self-efficacy behaviors of first year teachers in teaching in urban districts. Both studies indicate that overtime, teachers tend to move from analyzing and modifying their own behaviors, toward the modification of student behaviors and locating issues *within* the student. As discussed in the next section, part of this may be related to the dominant discourse in education, special education and disability.

Beliefs and Disability

For the purposes of this study, it was important to define disability and provide a lens through which disability was viewed for the primary researcher. In Valle and Connor (2011)

disability was defined using a disability studies lens. In contrast to the medical model of disability, disability studies considers disability a "marker of human difference" similar to race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual orientation" (Valle & Connor, 2011, p. xi). Similarly, I define disability using a disability studies lens as the perspective that disabled individuals should be at the forefront/represented in research that involves their education, well-being and futures. It rejects the traditional medical model approach used in public schools across the United States, opting for a more person-centered approach. Additionally, disability studies attempts to merge ideas from other theoretical perspectives involved in examining difference (critical race studies, feminist theory, queer theory, etc.). In this way, disability studies also involves the intersecting identities of disabled people rather than simply fore grounding the dis-abled portion of their identities as is often done to categorize and service students in public schools.

Furthermore, the dominant discourse in special education in public schools suggests that disability tends to be centered within the child rather than the teacher or school context (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). Over time, special education teachers may internalize the idea that actions and/or behaviors occur as a result of something within the child, their family and/or community, rather than within the school environment, teacher decisions, and/or other external influences.

Beyond the dominant discourse, beliefs about disability are also deeply influenced by how knowledge has been previously constructed within the field of special education. Rice (2006) identifies three frameworks which guide knowledge production in special education: (1) positivism (2) interpretivism, and (3) emancipatory. In a positivist special education framework, disability is discovered *within* the child. Special education teachers use intervention research to guide their selection of the best practices and strategies to fix or support the child in overcoming his/her disability and related behaviors (Rice, 2006). Historically, the field of

special education has emphasized scientifically-based behavioral interventions for students with disabilities (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Skritic, 1995). In this way, the positivist special education framework is derived from a more psycho-medical view of disability, in which disability is equated with disorder and needs to be improved or cured (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Maring, 2012).

Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Maring (2012) also discuss how the dominant discourse in special education has been influenced by behavioral psychology, medicine, and psychometrics. The medical model has specifically focused on diagnosing disabilities and specific skill deficits within students. Psychometric tools promise objectivity and the use of research to determine how to best address specific deficits in students. Additionally, Brownell, Ross, Colón, and McCallum (2005) found that when surveying 64 special education teacher education programs and/or dual certification programs, over 30 % of these programs were using a positivistic framework of teacher learning, which framed knowledge as constructed by experts. Thus special education typically takes a deficit-based approach to the education of children, and this is the dominant discourse within the public school system in the United States (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Maring, 2012): fix what is presumed to be broken.

In an effort to move towards student-centered instruction, by contrast, the interpretivist framework for special education considers disability as a social construction that is best understood by examining interactions between the student and others and the meanings they attach to those interactions. Special educators working within this framework consider families and students themselves as important sources of information, as they seek to develop deep understandings of their students. This deep knowledge is then used to co-create individualized outcomes and opportunities that support student development (Rice, 2006). In the interpretivist

framework, beliefs and knowledge are constructed through an understanding of students and their abilities. Knowledge of students as individuals guides learning and outcomes.

Like the interpretivist framework, special educators working within the emancipatory framework believe knowledge is constructed through learning about students, with the students, and their families (Rice, 2006). However, in this approach, special education teachers also develop knowledge by engaging in self-reflection to identify and challenge their and others' assumptions and beliefs about their students. They help students, their families, and others to also engage in this critique, enabling them to work together to challenge assumptions and beliefs about disability and its intersections with race, gender, sexuality, and other identifying factors (Rice, 2006; Liasidou, 2013). Special educators working within this approach make an effort to ensure that education supports students rather than replicating existing systems, structures, and policies based on bifurcated notions of ability/disability, normal/abnormal, perpetuating dominance, power imbalances, and inequities (Liasidou, 2013).

Consequently, some special education teachers' beliefs may stem from more sociocultural theories of learning and place a greater emphasis on teaching for social justice (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Maring, 2012). Such educators believe that learning cannot simply be reduced to an automatic skill set that works for every child. Learning is generated through context in the eyes of these special education teachers.

In 2006, Broderick, Reid, and Valle surveyed teacher candidates who were part of a disability studies listserv through either Columbia University or through another humanities listserv. The questionnaires were structured around three major themes: "(a) we cannot essentialize teachers and teaching, (b) theory and practice are necessarily dialectically related, and (c) when necessary, teachers engage in resistance" (Broderick et al., 2006, p.134).

Essentializing teachers and teaching, as a theme, attempted to move away from monolithic representations of teachers towards more intersecting identities based on features such as gender, race, class, etc. (Broderick et al., 2006). The theme of theory and practice examined how these two entities were related to each other and also how it is necessary for individuals from both worlds to communicate with each other in the field of education. Finally, the theme of teacher resistance suggested that despite dominant ideologies in schools regarding disability, it may be necessary for teachers to attempt to resist these power structures, and in turn, teach their students to resist.

Study results revealed that teacher perceptions of the relationship between theoretical and pedagogical practices are "varied, complex and shifting" (Broderick et al., 2006, p. 150). All of the teachers who participated experienced different levels of challenge in resisting dominant beliefs about disability at their schools. The authors reported, however, that all of the teachers, who had previously participated in disability studies coursework, were engaging in some form of resistance such as educating colleagues about disability, providing opportunities for critical dialogues with students and community members, and examining/re-examining their own identities (Broderick et al., 2006).

Valle and Connor (2011) emphasizes, therefore, that "what teachers believe about disability determines how students with disabilities are *really* educated" (p. 13). While the infrastructure of special education is set up to identify and provide for students with disabilities, it is the special education teacher and their relationship with the student which challenges or propagates this discourse. Therefore, while special education teacher beliefs about disability are varied, frameworks of knowledge and belief construction in special education tend to fall across a spectrum. Beliefs about disability move across the spectrum from positivist to emancipatory

(Rice, 2006). It is important to understand that beliefs about disability are not static entities and that special education teachers may change their views about disability over time.

Beliefs and Race

Valle and Connor (2011) explain that a critique of special education is necessary given the role special education has played historically in the stigmatizing of individuals, maintenance of separation of non-dominant groups based on race, ethnicity, culture and/or language, contribution to the school-to-prison pipeline, and the limited post-secondary opportunities provided to students within special education. Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) also emphasize a rift in the field of special education and general education in terms of framing of disability and the examination of diverse populations. They mention how conversations regarding disability seem to be lost in the field of general education and discussions of diversity left out of special education. While disciplinary influences, such as behaviorism and the medical framing of disability, and accessing content and curriculum, seem to permeate the field of special education, an examination of the normative structure of racism and teacher responses to race in classrooms permeate discussions in general education (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012). This next section addresses literature related to special education teachers' beliefs regarding diversity, specifically race and culture.

Historically through science, there have been attempts to use the brains of deceased individuals to prove the racial inferiority of African American individuals (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2012). W.E.B. DuBois (1920) also wrote about how measuring head size and providing culturally insensitive testing was a means of justification for the segregation and unequal treatment of black and brown individuals throughout history. It should come as no surprise then

that schools in the United States continue to segregate black and brown students into lower performing tracks and the most restrictive classrooms.

Consequently, if race is seen as a means of categorizing and pathologizing individuals, it is evident that dominant discourse in public schools in the United States views race scientifically similar to the ways in which disability is viewed through the medical model. Therefore, it is important to define race and the lens through which it was used for this dissertation study. For the purposes of this study, race is defined as a social construction. As Erevelles and Minear (2010) explain, it is important to consider more intersectional frameworks such as the anti-categorical framework which insists on identifying factors such as gender, race, and disability as socially constructed entities. As such, race too is a social construction and more complex than the simplified categories typically used in educational data reports.

Beliefs and Culture

Culture, too, intersects with race in several ways. Erickson (1997) explains that culture, as it relates to teaching and education involves both implicit and explicit components. The implicit components of culture include things such as values, assumptions, and beliefs, while the explicit components include habits and behaviors. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, culture can be context specific and is defined as dynamic, shifting, and complex within and among communities. This study used beliefs about culture to indicate teacher beliefs in terms of navigating school culture (teacher culture) as well as beliefs about the cultural backgrounds of their students.

Specifically, there is a "teacher culture" which includes beliefs and attitudes towards particular teaching methods and approaches such as adoption of standards or student-centered learning (Hargreaves, 1996). Additionally, there is a culture around strategies for teaching

students from a culturally relevant perspective (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Similar to the emancipatory framework found in knowledge construction of special education, culturally relevant pedagogy moves students beyond achievement to embrace their various cultural identities, challenge structural inequalities, and develop critical perspectives (Ladson Billings, 1995). Thus culture, like race and disability is a complicated term which is context specific.

As mentioned above, when referring to race, however, culturally biased examinations and cultural assumptions about a particular group of students have, unfortunately, become a part of teacher culture in special education and also a part of the dominant discourse in public education. As Lareau (1987) mentions, schools tend to value a particular kind of cultural capital over others, and therefore tend to reproduce social inequalities.

Erevelles and Minear (2010) explain that continued deficit beliefs about students and communities of color have been linked to disproportionality. In other words, the over representation of students from racial and/or cultural groups such as African American, Latino/a, and/or indigenous populations has been linked to specific disability categories such as emotional/behavioral disturbance, learning disability and mental retardation [sic] (Erevelles & Minear, 2010). In large urban school districts, which tend to have high concentrations of marginalized racial and socioeconomic groups, this is especially true (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007). Lower performing public schools in low socioeconomic neighborhoods tend to have high concentrations of students of color. Additionally, in these environments there is typically a cultural mismatch between professionals and their students/families which can lead to referrals for special education services based on faulty reasoning or beliefs (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2004).

When looking specifically at deficit beliefs, Sleeter (2004) explains that when white teachers are being educated about racial biases, racism is located as within individuals. This can

be problematic because it suggests that racist beliefs are irrational or deviant rather than normative (Sleeter, 2004). Critical race theorists and scholars tend to dispute the claim that racism is individually constructed and instead maintain that it is socially constructed (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Thus, teacher beliefs about race and culture may be linked, in part, to their educational preparation when working with communities of color.

Sleeter (1992) conducted qualitative interviews with twenty-six teachers over a two-year period of time through a multicultural staff development project about their understanding of race and culture. Many of these teachers upheld a color-blind ideology, in which they attempted to ignore issues of race and cultural backgrounds of their students in an effort to treat all individuals as equals. While well intentioned, color-blind beliefs held by general and special education teachers in public schools are problematic because they attempt to cover up racist thoughts rather than examine and understand them critically. Other teachers in the study chose to blame external factors for educational inequity, which is known as "culture of poverty" beliefs (Sleeter, 1995, p.38). Ladson-Billings (2004) also mentions that too often when teachers are unable to understand their students or identify with their particular behaviors, they point to the students' culture as the overarching explanation. She goes further to explain that culture only seems to be the answer when the students in question are non-white, speak a first language other than English, and/or are not born inside the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

The study by Sleeter (1992) emphasized that educating white teachers about race was and continues to be a challenging endeavor due to some of the deeply engrained beliefs held by these individuals around ideas about students' cultural and racial backgrounds. When thinking specifically about racist attitudes and beliefs, the study also emphasizes the need to move away from static explanations of racism towards a more intersectional approach. Specifically, this

means moving beyond singular causes of racism like poverty, or culturally specific behaviors, as if every individual in a particular cultural community behaves in similar ways. It also means complicating race, culture, and disability, especially in terms of the overrepresented students of color in special education settings (Artiles, 2013).

Intersectionality of Beliefs

Similar to intersections among personal identities and identifying factors, beliefs are also intersectional. Special education teacher beliefs about disability, race, and culture may intersect along several lines of classroom practice and student success. Crenshaw (1991) explains that intersectionality is the study of the interactions among multiple systems of oppression and marginalization. As mentioned previously, the anti-categorical approach to intersectionality suggests that race/class/gender/disability, etc. are socially constructed elements (McCall, 2005). Additionally, the intra-categorical framework critiques simply adding identifying features together and focuses specifically on the points of intersection which are traditionally neglected (McCall, 2005). Lastly, the inter-categorical examines structural relationships within several groups.

Research has shown how beliefs about disability, race, and culture intersect in the process of referral and identification for special education services (Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Erevelles & Minear, 2010). However, to date, no studies have been conducted on how beliefs about disability, race, and culture may intersect to inform special education teacher decisions about whether to continue teaching in large, urban districts. This underscores the importance of utilizing a framework for understanding intersecting and complex beliefs which may inform the attrition/retention of special education teachers.

Summary

This literature review focused on three major areas related to how beliefs about disability, race, and culture influence the whether special education teachers chose to continue teaching in a large urban school district. Specifically, this literature review examined research related to special education retention and attrition; beliefs about disability, race, and culture for understanding beliefs about retention in special education. The original literature search to find studies addressing how special education teacher beliefs influence retention yielded no results.

Instead, retention and attrition literature centers on multivariate or bivariate frameworks (Shen, 1997). Billingsley's (2004) review of the literature also highlighted internal and external factors related to retention and attrition such as caseload, paperwork, stress levels, support, mentorship, etc. The literature also highlights the importance of teacher education and experience in retention (Ingersoll, 2001; Billingsley, 2004). Billingsley (2004) also looked at the influence of beliefs, but initial findings were inconclusive (Billingsley, 2004).

Teacher beliefs are an area of interest in the field of education in general (Fang, 1996). Former research in the area of teacher beliefs examines how beliefs become aligned with dominant discourse as teachers become more experienced (Lavigne, 2010). In special education, beliefs about disability tend to fall along a continuum from more traditionally positivist frameworks to more emancipatory (Rice 2006). This is also true for beliefs about race and culture. Beliefs about race historically began with a scientific classification system in which black and brown individuals were seen as inferior to whites. This aligns with the dominant framings of racial differences in public school discourse. Yet, race can be seen as a socially constructed entity and as intersectional with disability and other identifying factors. Similarly, culture is also context dependent on the context in which it is used. Teacher culture is important

in thinking about the beliefs teachers hold and the practices which they choose to carry forward in teaching, such as the commitment to being a culturally relevant educator. Culture is also important in thinking about difference and the ways in which students, particularly students of color, are identified for special education and thought of as having culturally specific behavior (Ladson-Billings, 2004). Additionally, with regards to teacher education and perspective, it is important to highlight the ways in which some teachers, particularly those from white backgrounds, tend to move from a color-blind ideology to a more culturally inclusive and responsive framework (Sleeter, 1995).

Discussions about beliefs regarding disability, race, and culture suggest that beliefs themselves are intersectional and that there may be overlap among these beliefs just as there is an overlap among levels of personal identity. Intersecting and changing beliefs highlight the need for a framework which can examine these various factors at different levels.

Overall, research is needed on how beliefs about disability, race, and culture intersect to inform the retention of special education teachers in urban districts, which tend to include more students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Chapter 3 continues this conversation by justifying the importance of understanding beliefs through qualitative research. Literature and scholarship, which aims to understand how special education teacher beliefs are related to retention in schools has implications for pre-service teaching and teacher education (Sleeter, 1995); connections between beliefs and in-service teaching (Fang, 1996); and improving job quality and retention for special education teachers working in urban districts.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand how beliefs about disability, race, and culture influenced the retention decisions of special education teachers in an urban school district. This study utilized an in-depth examination of multiple cases, where each case was represented by an individual special education teacher. In seeking to understand how specific beliefs contribute to special education teacher retention in an urban school district, three research questions were used to guide this study.

Research Questions

1. How do special education teachers explain their reasons for remaining in or leaving an urban district?

2. What are the key sources of special education teachers beliefs about disability, race, and culture?

3. How do beliefs about disability, race, and culture intersect to inform special education teacher retention in a large urban district?

This chapter describes the study's methodology. Specifically, it addresses (a) the research design, qualitative case study; (b) sampling and participant selection; (c) the research context; (d) researcher as instrument; (e) data collection; (f) data analysis; (g) trustworthiness and reliability; and (h) study limitations.

Qualitative Design

Qualitative research is a means of understanding human or social problems through the exploration of an individual or group of individuals (Creswell, 2008). Qualitative research focuses more on meaning and interpretation than concrete or objective solutions. In contrast with quantitative research, which tests a hypothesis to gather objective facts about particular

variables, qualitative research is set up to examine the particular rather than the general (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Because the goal of this dissertation is to *understand* individual and collective beliefs of special education teachers and how these beliefs contribute to retention in an urban district, quantitative data collection is unlikely to produce the level of detail required to address the purpose and research questions in depth (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative research lends itself to the qualities of the research questions such that it is utilized to understand how processes take place, includes a contextual understanding, and allows for flexibility between researcher and participant (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Within a qualitative approach, this study is best suited for a case study design. Case study is a methodological approach which examines the "complexity of a single case" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Stake (1995) explains that a case can be anything, as long as it is a bounded system. In qualitative data analysis, the case can take on several forms. The case can be intrinsic, which means that the researcher is interested in the case itself and not how it can represent a larger problem. The case can also be instrumental, which means that the case represents something else and is studied to understand a larger issue. Instrumental case studies can include multiple participants (individual cases) and make cross-case comparisons to understand a particular issue in detail.

For this dissertation study, individual teachers served as bounded systems and cross case comparisons were made among them. Special education teacher participants, who served as cases, were instrumental to learning about how beliefs about race, culture and disability influenced decisions regarding teacher retention. The case study approach enabled the ability to pick individual participants and then study them in-depth. Each special education teacher in this

study served as his/her own bounded system and analysis of data looked at individual special education teachers and across them.

Sampling and Participant Selection

In qualitative research, an inquirer generally selects individuals for a study because they provide a purposeful set of qualities or ideas that inform the central research problem and questions (Creswell, 2008). Purposeful sampling ensures that researchers can gather data which is consistent with the method of inquiry (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, qualitative research can use different kinds of sampling strategies depending on the types of information the researcher is seeking (Creswell, 2007).

In this study, purposeful sampling was done to ensure that all cases (special education teachers) met a set of criteria which coincided with the existing research questions, the central research problem, and in order to privilege the knowledge that special education teachers in the district of interest possessed (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Special education teachers were carefully selected using a few different methods. First, I reached out to known contacts in the district who worked as special education teachers. From this pool of approximately ten special education teachers, five teachers agreed to participate. Of those five teachers, one was unable to commit to the study timeline and one was ineligible based on her current teaching assignment subject area, resulting in three teachers who could participate. Next, I contacted a few known individuals who had previously taught in the district of interest. These individuals recommended three special education teachers in the district of interest who met the eligibility criteria. After reaching out to these individuals, two of the three special education teachers agreed to participate and met the eligibility and timeline requirements. Creswell (2007) recommends that purposeful snowball sampling works well when participants have particular shared experiences such as in a

case study.   By utilizing a series of known and recommended individuals, I was able to gather a diverse array of special education teacher participants in terms of their experiences and backgrounds.

In this dissertation study, special education teachers included individuals who met the first two criteria for highly qualified teachers (see Chapter 1). Selected participants had special education certification or a license to teach special education, or were inducted as part of an emergency licensure program, and passed the state's multiple subjects' examination. Qualification to teach in a core subject depended on whether the teacher entered the district traditionally or through an emergency preparation program and was not considered part of the selection criteria for participants of this study.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria below were described to each special education teacher who was approached about participating in this study. Participants were selected to participate in the study based on the following eligibility requirements:

a. Participants had to be U.S. citizens with a working knowledge of the English language

b. Participants must have been full-time special education teachers in the district of interest for at least one full school year by the time they were asked to participate in the study[2].

c. Participants should have possessed a credential to teach special education teachers OR were in the process of obtaining a credential when asked to participate in the study. Special education teacher candidates who were part-time teachers, student

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[2] This criteria was important in understanding what Billingsley (2007) explained was the critical period for leaving the profession; typically in teachers with less than three years of experience.

teaching, or completing a practicum requirement without having their own classroom were not asked to participate.

d. Participants were special education teachers at the elementary, middle, or high school level (K-12) and work in a regular, public school[3]

e. Special education teacher participants were teaching in categorical or cross-categorically listed programs for special education. These include, but are not limited to (a) Mild/Moderate Inclusive Programs, Mild/Moderate Special Day Classes, Mild/Moderate Resource Classrooms/Learning Support, Moderate/Severe Inclusion Programs, and Moderate/Severe Special Day Classes

A total of N=5 special education teachers representative of a range of characteristics within the above selection criteria were selected to participate for the study. As mentioned before, qualitative researchers seek to understand the particular (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, sample size for this study was smaller because each special education teacher was analyzed extensively both individually and compared/contrasted with other participants.

Participants

As mentioned above, special education teacher participants were selected by contacting known special education teachers in the district, and then through recommendations of individuals who fit the selection criteria. The school district did not know the names of the individual participants in order to protect their positions and information. Once research approval was obtained through the Institutional Review Board (IRB), special education teachers were contacted directly via an email to invite them to participate in data collection, which

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[3]Some research suggests that alternative school programs have requirements that are quite different than general public school (Tobin &Sprague, 2000), and teachers who work in these kinds of classrooms may not have as much insight into public education in Rockland due to their students' individualized schooling.

included a series of interviews and reflection responses. The selection criterion for participants was a way to ensure a representative sample of special education teachers in the urban district of interest. Every attempt was made to select individuals from dominant and non-dominant backgrounds, varying levels of teaching experiences, beliefs, and preparation to participate in the study.

The five special education teachers who participated in the study are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Teacher Characteristics and Demographics

Pseudonym	Years Teaching SE in District	Cert Type	Grade Level/Placement	Age/Gender/Race
Althea Lee Miller	7 years	Alt.Cert.	Elem/Mild/Seg	34/F/AfricanAm.
Rebecca Kingsley	5 years	Alt.Cert.	High Sch/Res	27/F/White
Claudia Aguilar	9 years	Exp. Cert.	Mid Sch/Incl	35/F/MexicanAm.
Nick Harlan	5 years	Alt. Cert.	Elem/Incl	30/M/White
Stacey Keiser	7 years	Exp. Cert.	High Sch/Incl	34/F/White

*SE stands for Special Education
*Alt stands for alternative, Exp. stands for expedited, and Cert stands for certification
*Grade levels are abbreviated as Elem=elementary, Mid Sch=middle school, and High Sch=high school
*Placement types are abbreviated as Seg= segregated setting, Res=resource class, and Incl=inclusion
* All demographic information is self-reported and Am stands for American

As seen in Table 1 participants worked in a variety of special education settings with three special education teachers who worked in an inclusion program, one teacher who worked in a resource program, and one who worked in a segregated classroom. Within the district of interest, inclusion programs are for students with more significant disabilities, while the resource

program is meant for students with mild disabilities such as learning disabilities and EBD. Althea Lee Miller's classroom was also tailored towards students with more mild disabilities except that all of the students were placed in a classroom together rather than receiving assistance outside of general education, as is typically done in resource programs. The age ranges of the participants were from 27-35 years old with years of experience teaching ranging from 5-9 years in the district. Participants included one white male, two white females, one Mexican American female, and one African American female. Teacher participants also had a variety of experiences prior to entering the district and field of special education. Three of the five teachers entered the district through alternative certification programs such as Teach for America® or The New Teacher Project ®. The remaining two teachers went through an expedited teacher education program which began before they entered the classroom, but were placed in a permanent co-teaching position prior to completing their credential programs. As mentioned in Chapter 2, however, this is not uncommon for the state of California (McLeskey et al., 2004).

Research Context

This study utilized the perspectives and experiences of special education teachers who work/worked in an urban school district in the western United States. In order to protect district identity and teachers who agreed to participate in this study, pseudonyms are used for the school district in which the teachers worked, as well as each of the participant. Henceforth, the district will be referred to as Rockport School District.

As mentioned below, my investment in collecting data in Rockport district stems from a familiarity with the state of California, having previously worked as a special education teacher there. It also comes from a desire to work with teachers who were similar in context and

experiences to those with whom I worked as a special education teacher. This familiarly led me to choose Rockport as a representative urban school district in which to recruit participants.

Although somewhat different than other urban districts, Rockport School District is considered a large urban district which includes more than 100 schools, including elementary, middle, and high schools; alternative education programs, and adult education schools. As of 2013, approximately 40,000 students attended the Rockport School District. This included about 95% of students from K-12 programs, and about five percent from adult programs. Additionally, approximately 6000 employees worked for the Rockport district (Snell, 2012).

Demographics

Demographically, as of 2013, the largest demographic groups of students in the district were African Americans and Hispanics. Combined these students made up a more than 70% of the district's students, while the remaining students were identified as Asian, White, and other. Approximately 2/3s of these students were eligible for free and reduced lunch and a little less than 1/3 were English language learners (Snell, 2012). Finally, approximately 10% of the total student population in Rockport was eligible for special education services. All but one of the participants' individual school sites had more or less than 10% of their school population eligible for special education services. Like many large urban school districts, Rockport struggles to recruit a diverse teaching workforce that reflects the students they serve (Snell, 2012). For specific data about each participant's school, please see Table 2 below.

Table 2

Teacher Participants' School Characteristics

Teacher	School*	Total Enrollment	% Minority	% Special Education
Althea Lee Miller	World Prep (K-5)	400 students	98 %	8%
Rebecca Kingsley	Central High (6-12)	450 students	99%	11%
Claudia Aguilar	Memorial Middle (6-8)	900 students	50%	13%
Nick Harlan	Goodman Elementary (K-5)	600 students	97%	8%
Stacey Keiser	Overlook High School (9-12)	2000 students	75%	10%

*All school names are pseudonyms
% Minority is used in data as compared to White
All data came from The California Department of Education (CDE, 2011-2012)

History

Historically, Rockport School District has struggled with financial concerns. Over the past 8-10 years, school reform efforts, such as the standards-based movement, and several accountability measures, such as having *all* students, including students with disabilities, graduate, have increased pressure on the district. District responses to these pressures led to some improvements in Academic Performance Index (API) scores. However, Rockport still ranks academically within the lower tier of districts within the state. Unfortunately, like other urban school districts, Rockport School District struggles with high levels of teacher turnover (Billingsley, 2007).

The city which houses Rockport School District also has a turbulent history with gang violence, high unemployment, and poverty. Unfortunately, the reality of these issues is

exaggerated by media portrayal through outlets such as the Discovery Channel or by news reports of homicide rates. What is typically unknown about the city in which Rockport School District is housed, is that it also has a rich history of art, music, and culture. It is the birthplace to famous writers, actors, and artists. Deficit perspectives of the city and community have led to redevelopment efforts which have created gentrified communities (Posey-Maddox, 2014), creating large disparities across the city's communities/neighborhoods. Furthermore, deficit perspectives of the city have challenged the school district, increasing school closures while simultaneously creating charter and independent schools, as well as resulting in understaffed classrooms.

The school district serves students with disabilities on a continuum. Special education teachers in California obtain a credential in either mild/moderate or moderate/severe disabilities. These credentials enable special education teachers to work in a continuum of placements, including the three main settings found in the district of interest: (a) special day class, (b) resource class, and (c) full inclusion (CDE, 2015). Students with disabilities may receive their education in special day classes, which are self-contained classrooms for students with disabilities and typically operate separate from general education. Students with disabilities may also receive instruction in resource classes. However, unlike special day classes, these students are in the separate resource classroom for only part of their school day, receiving individualized or group support in the subject(s) in which they struggle. Finally, full inclusion refers to educating students primarily in general education classrooms. In this option, students with moderate to severe disabilities receive specific supports, such as modified curriculum and adult supports, in general education classrooms. In addition to teaching, a special education teacher in

the district of interest manages a caseload of students with particular support needs and also acts as the manager of each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Researcher as Instrument

The research questions and procedures for this study were informed by my identity as a female, person of color, radical educator, and product of a public school education in the United States. My interest in understanding how beliefs of current urban special education teachers contribute to retention stemmed from my own experiences as a special education teacher of elementary and middle school students with disabilities in a large urban school district.

Specifically, I recall facing challenges of holding more critical beliefs about the inclusion of my students with disabilities, views about families and communities of color, and issues of access. During my time as a teacher, I worked tirelessly to fight for the inclusion of my students in general education settings, and school wide activities; even when it was not always widely accepted. I also made efforts to learn about my students and their families through home visits and community programs. I also worked to challenge the pervasive rhetoric suggesting that some families and communities did not value education and, therefore, did not show up to Individualized Education Program meetings or school outings. My personal beliefs about disability, race, and culture, directly influenced the ways in which I advocated for my students and their families.

Through my experiences as a special education teacher in a large, urban school district, I also gained in-depth understanding about social and economic stratification. While I did not grow up extremely wealthy, my family was always able to put food on the table, we always had a safe and supportive home environment, and both of my parents completed some post-secondary education. Working predominantly in school settings in which the majority of the students and

their families came from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, I had to remain cognizant about my own privilege and acknowledge this as a difference in experiences.

Additionally, I was fortunate enough to participate in the Teacher Education for a Multicultural Society (TEAMS) AmeriCorps program while I worked as a special education teacher. It was through this program that I learned about racial inequalities facing students in urban settings and ways to respond through social justice education. It was often difficult to negotiate my stances on culturally relevant instruction with school and district agendas related to accountability and test scores. It was through the TEAMS program and meetings with other special education teachers that I learned about the vast differences in beliefs among special education teachers.

Finally, I had the unique perspective of working in an urban school district as a special education teacher under an emergency credential program. This provided me with insights that greatly shaped this study. It is how I became interested in why some teachers chose to continue to teach in an urban district, teaching special education, while others choose to leave. My desire to conduct this study in Rockport district stems from my personal investment in the growth and success of public schools and public school teachers in the United States. It also shapes my role and the procedures undertaken in this study.

Data Collection

For this dissertation study on the retention of urban special education teachers, three specific forms of data were collected from participants: in-depth interviews, prompt-based journal reflections, and reflections. This section addresses the instruments used for the interviews and journal reflections and the data collection process.

Several steps were important in carrying out this dissertation study. First, a review of the literature (see Chapter 2) was used to examine the contributions of special education scholars to the areas of teacher retention and beliefs. Second, after the completion of the dissertation proposal defense, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was completed. This included all procedures and processes for data collection, analysis, and confidentiality (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, recruitment was a critical step in the process of selecting special education teacher participants. Once participants were recruited into the study, they were required to complete both an eligibility form and a consent form (see Appendix C) to formalize their participation. During this period, participants were also able to begin scheduling their first interviews by phone.

The last step in the implementation of this study included having participants complete 3 in-depth interviews and a series of six prompt-based journal reflections, regarding their background in special education, follow-up information on beliefs, and any clarifications or last thoughts about special education teacher retention, respectively. Therefore, this study was carried forward through the process of framing and defining the literature, completing the IRB process, recruiting and finally collecting data from participants. All of these steps are described in more detail in the following sections.

Literature Review

An ongoing literature review was commenced in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. The literature review focused on (1) decisions regarding continuing to teach special education in an urban district; (2) beliefs about disability, race, and culture as well as their intersections; and (3) knowledge construction in special education, including theoretical frameworks for examining

special education teacher beliefs as they relate to retention. The existing literature highlighted

the need for examining special education retention from the standpoint of teacher beliefs rather

than focusing exclusively on external factors such as paperwork or caseload (Billingsley, 2007).

IRB Approval

After successfully completing the dissertation proposal defense, approval for conducting

the study was obtained from both the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Permission was not

obtained specifically from the Rockport School District because all data collection for special

education teacher participants was completed outside of the school setting. Additionally,

working around the school district helped protect the identities of all participants and allowed

them to speak freely about their beliefs and intent to remain or leave the district. Once approval

was obtained, all special education teacher participants were provided with informed consent

forms detailing the purpose and related information for the study.

Instrumentation

Protocols for the major sources of data, interviews and writing prompts, were developed

by reviewing existing research on special education teacher retention and beliefs, my personal

experiences as a special education teacher in an urban school district, and the experiences of

former special and general education teachers who worked in large urban school districts. Each

is described in depth in this section.

In-depth interview protocol. As indicated above, in-depth interview protocol questions

were drafted based on a literature review and my experiences. As questions were developed, they

were sent to one general education and two special education teachers to review and provide

comments. The teachers who participated in the pilot testing of in-depth interview questions

were not participants in the actual dissertation study. A one-day Google Hangout ® session was

used to communicate with former special education and general education teachers. This meeting served to pilot the interview questions and also receive feedback about how to structure questions more effectively for the participants. These teachers provided feedback on how well they were able to respond to the in-depth interviews and suggestions for phrasing of questions to help obtain the most information possible. They suggested making questions more open-ended, and cautioned against me using leading questions to limit my participants' responses. One general education teacher suggested that instead of asking about the type of teacher education program attended, I might additionally ask about teaching experiences prior to working as a full-time special education teacher. This information provided more detail about experiences within the field of education more broadly for each participant. It also gave me a clearer understanding about their trajectories into special education. Revisions to the initial protocol were made based on the feedback received from the teachers. Subsequent interviews were informed by some participant responses, and helped shape further questioning.

   Bi-weekly reflection journal prompts. Bi-weekly reflection prompts were also derived from the literature review, my own educational experiences with day-to-day classroom interactions, and suggestions provided by the general and special education teachers during pilot testing of in-depth interview questions. Some of the questions and ideas suggested during the pilot testing were not suitable for the in-depth interviews and worked better for the journal prompts. For example, one special education teacher suggested asking an in-depth interview question about how overwhelmed a participant might feel this year as opposed to previous school years. I felt this question was one that required some reflection from participants and decided to include it as a journal prompt rather than an in-depth interview question. Like the interview questions, journal prompts were modified before they were implemented.

Data Collection Process

As described below, data were collected from three in-depth interviews of each participant at different points in the school year; a series of prompt-based special education journal reflections collected every two to three weeks; and reflections, which were completed after every interview, during transcription of interviews, and on each journal prompt reflection submitted by participants. For this study, as suggested by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), I composed my reflections temporally, starting with the outline of my general questions and aligning the notes to questions and prompt responses in sequence.

In-depth interviews. Participants engaged in three, in-depth interviews to confirm or reassess their individual beliefs about disability, race, and culture as well as to connect their individual and cross case beliefs to their decisions to continue to teach in an urban school district. In-depth interviews have the advantage of providing participants with the opportunity of sharing detailed information in narrative form (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Additionally, in-depth interviews allow researchers to obtain information about individual experiences and perspectives that may not be expressed in more structured formats. In-depth interviews ask questions such as "why" and "how" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Although initial protocol questions for in-depth interviews can be seen in Appendix A, strictly adhering to interview protocol limits the scope of data which can be gathered through this method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Therefore, at times, questions deviated from interview protocols to allow for individual variations in responses.   I was also able to continue building a rapport with my participants through the in-depth interviews. I used Seidman's (1991) book on qualitative interviewing to structure interviews with participants in sets of three. As Seidman (1991) explained, the initial interview is set up to allow participants to share their histories and

background. Therefore, during the initial interview, participants were able to share their

backgrounds and how they decided to become special education teachers.   Intermittently, I

started to share a little bit about myself with the participants and encouraged them to provide

more details as I asked questions, building in trust. By the second interview, participants were

encouraged to share more concrete details as relevant to their beliefs about disability, race, and

culture. By the third interview, participants were able to reflect on their overall experiences and

make meaning of the information provided (Seidman, 1991). Specifically, first of these

interviews covered background information on the participant such as type of teacher preparation

program, years of teaching, reasons for entering the field of special education, and type of

caseload/program participants are involved in during their work as teachers in Rockport.

A second, follow up, interview happened a month later. During this interview

participants were asked more detailed information about their beliefs about race, culture, and

disability. They were also asked to think about the perceptions they felt others in their school

communities had about them and their students and about how they see the structures of these

concepts operating at a higher level in the education system.

Finally, a third and final in-depth interview was completed and centered on the topic of

retention. Participants were asked about their intentions to continue teaching in the district, what

factors influenced their decisions, and also how these intentions connected with their beliefs.

Each interview also allowed space for clarifying questions to emerge from subsequent

interviews. This ensured that information which was relevant to the study was obtained over the

course of data collection.

All of the in-depth interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half in length.

All three interviews were conducted on the phone with participants, and I recorded the

conversations using TapeACall®, a phone program that allowed me to audio record and immediately store audio files in a secure folder. A final exit interview was also conducted with each participant in person. At this stage reflections of initial impressions of the participant were gathered as they answered questions. Audio files for these in-depth interviews were transcribed verbatim and converted into a single text file for analysis for each participant. The transcriptions were completed by the primary researcher for this study to ensure intimacy with the data. Protocols for in-depth interviews are located in Appendix B.

Bi-Weekly Reflection Journals. In addition to three in-depth interviews, participants also engaged in keeping a journal throughout the duration of the spring semester of the school year. Janesick (1999) explains that participant journals can be used to refine ideas, beliefs and responses to research. Every two to three weeks, participants received a one-sentence journal prompt and were asked to take about thirty minutes to one hour to write a thoughtful, reflection response.

Responses to journal prompts were required to be at least one to two pages in length in order to provide the level of detail necessary to address prompts. Individuals will be asked to send a copy of responses to the research team either through email or regular mail. All individuals sent responses through email, either as an attachment or a Google Document ®. A total of 6 journal prompts were provided over the course of the study and required about 5-6 hours of participant time to complete. Sample journal prompts are located in Appendix C.

Summary. All of the data collected in this qualitative dissertation study aimed to understand special education teachers' beliefs about disability, race, and culture, and how beliefs influenced decisions to continue to teach in an urban school district. In-depth interviews, journal entries as well as ongoing reflections of these individual and collective beliefs of special

education teachers in an urban school district. The timing of for all data collection and analysis

can be found in Table 2.

Table 3

Study Timeline

Date	Activity
January 15th, 2014	Completed Institutional Review Board Application (IRB)
March 15th, 2014	IRB Approval Obtained/Participants Recruited
March 2014	In-Depth Interview 1 and first 2 Journal Prompts sent
March-April 2014	*On-going analysis continues*
April 2014	In-Depth Interview 2 and Journal Prompts 3 and 4 sent
April-May 2014	*On-going analysis continues*
May-June 2014	In-Depth Interview 3 and Journal Prompts 5 and 6 sent
June 2014	Data collection is completed
July-December 2014	Full Analysis began and consulted with participants as needed
January 2015-March 2015	Continued writing and revising
March 2015-May 2015	Committee Review and Final Study Defense

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing data in qualitative research involves moving from superficial

understanding to deeper understanding of text. Qualitative analysis is a constant reflection about

data, asking of questions and creation of memos (Creswell, 2008). Merriam (2009) also explains

that data collection and analysis can be a simultaneous process. In this study, analysis began

during data collection using on-going reflections to highlight important initial findings. Data

analysis for this study involved several important steps including (1) the preparation of data for

analysis, (2) sorting and coding information into categories, and (3) the generation of descriptive

case studies (Creswell, 2008).

Data Preparation

As mentioned above, data for this study of special education teacher retention was prepared through the word-for-word transcription of collected interviews as well as the text from all journal reflections submitted by participants. All transcriptions of interviews were completed by the primary researcher and included any pauses and enunciations in speech to gain as accurate a picture as possible from each interview. Participant journal entries were emailed directly to the primary researcher. While each prompt was emailed separately according to the collection timeline, journal entries were compiled into a single word document for each participant. Additionally, a password-protected file was created both on Google® Drive for each special education teacher and all converted transcriptions as well as journal prompts pertaining to individual participants were placed in these individual files. These text document files were then loaded into Dedoose®, a password-protected, cloud-based software program that aids in the detailed coding and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data.

Similar to other qualitative software programs, Dedoose® enables the sorting of textual and visual data into researcher-created categories. Throughout the process of sorting and creating categories, the software also includes a memo-generator to keep track of important ideas and concepts.

Coding

As Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) explain, the coding process fragments textual data into separate categories and requires looking at each section in detail. By contrast, synthesis of coded material involves piecing fragments back together to construct a complete illustration and understanding of ideas (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). In this dissertation study, I used Dedoose® to sort all of the data into categories which represented the main questions of inquiry for this

study. These categories included (a) why special education, (b) beliefs about disability, (c) beliefs about culture and race, (d) why teachers leave, and (e) why teachers stay.   Within each of these categories, I included child codes, which I obtained from the literature around teacher beliefs and retention (see Chapter 2). Additionally, I left myself open to adding in vivo codes when data did not neatly fit into established a priori codes. Therefore, during initial topic coding (Richards, 2009), all text relevant to these research topics was highlighted and sorted using codes, analytic memos, reflections, and any additional reflections and notes I collected throughout the study. In the initial analysis of the data, I placed emphasis on each individual participant and analyzed data for each individual first, before making cross case conclusions.

First cycle coding. As mentioned above, during the first cycle of coding, I used topic coding (Richards, 2009). For first cycle coding, data was only sorted into the categories of (a) why special education, (b) beliefs about disability, (c) beliefs about culture and race, (d) why teachers leave, and (e) why teachers stay for each individual. Within each of these categories, child codes were created in vivo and a priori through existing literature (see Appendix E for the extensive list of codes). As enough codes manifested, they eventually lead to the creation of a comprehensive codebook (Saldana, 2012).   By using the codebook, I assigned codes to all remaining transcribed interviews and journal prompts, until all text relevant to the research questions was compiled.

Second cycle coding. The second cycle of coding was meant to fine tune any individual as well as cross-case information which emerges from the data (Saldana, 2012). The second cycle of coding served to highlight and focus on the salient features of qualitative data (Saldana, 2012). During second cycle coding, an analytic coding approach was used (Richards, 2009). I went through the existing codes from first cycle coding and began thinking through them in-

depth, asking questions about significance and rationale for having highlighted the information initially. Second cycle coding was continued until reaching a point of saturation within the data. Overall, this process was more abstract and involved extensive memoing.

Memoing

Richards (2009) explained that memos are the places where ideas can become "more complex and, later, more confident" (p.80). For this dissertation study, memoing occurred throughout the process of data analysis, though more often during second cycle coding. Once all relevant text was coded and categorized, analytic memos served as the tools from which to make sense of connections between coded sections and the broad categories. Each memo included 1-2 sentences of text linked to the codes or broad categories through Dedoose®. It also included the date written which "stores the story of interpretation for the data" (Richards, 2009, p. 81). Finally, analytic memos were used to construct case studies of the special education teacher participants for the results section of this dissertation, including the individual cases and the cross case analysis.

Case Studies

Stake (1995) explained that with instrumental case studies in which the case provides meaning about some other phenomena or relationships, there is a "need for categorical data and measurement (p. 77). Once coding reached a point of saturation and the themes generated were comprehensive, the data collected from special education teacher participants was used to create individual cases describing how beliefs about disability, race, and culture influenced their individual retention in an urban district. In other words, codes and memos were reorganized for each participant in order to construct thoughtful and descriptive cases. These cases were then

compared and contrasted with each other to reach any new levels of meaning for a cross-case analysis.

The comparing and contrasting of the cases generated from first and second cycle coding represented the last stages in analysis of the data. As comparing and contrasting occurred, so did the corroborating of evidence and examination of outlying ideas and concepts (Silverman, 2010). Examining all possible ideas was important in maintaining the authenticity of the participants and their experiences as well as the reliability of the methods used. For the full analysis and case studies, see chapters 4 and 5.

Trustworthiness and Reliability

Several other methods were utilized to ensure authenticity of the data collection, coding, and analysis. Good validity in qualitative research comes in part from the researcher's ability to share how they arrived at conclusions and how they built confidence into the study results (Richards, 2009). There were several methods to help ensure validity in this qualitative study. For this dissertation study, these methods included triangulation (across data source and participant), member checking, and repeated interviews. Each of these methods for validity and trustworthiness will be described in detail in the next section.

Triangulation

All of the data obtained for this study of special education teacher retention in an urban district was collected through interviews, weekly journal reflections, and my own reflections. The use of multiple sources of data provided opportunities for multiple interpretations of the same concepts or ideas. Using multiple data sources in a case study can help generate a more holistic picture of each individual case (Stake, 1995).

Additionally, this study utilized the experiences and beliefs of five different special education teachers in an urban district. As mentioned in the selection criteria and sampling

sections of this chapter, every effort was made to select participants who had a variety of experiences as teachers of students with disabilities. Triangulation ensured that the opinions and perspectives of one particular individual did not influence the overall study implications (Creswell, 2008).

Member Checking

Another method that ensured that one particular individual did not influence the overall study was done through member checking. This means taking part of the analysis back to participants to review. For this study of special education teacher retention, participants had the opportunity to review the final descriptive case study of their interviews, journal prompts, and compiled reflections before the final results were completed.

Repeated Interviews

Participants also had another opportunity, during data collection, to express any ideas, beliefs, or perspectives that did not come up during the first set of interviews. The use of multiple interviews provided an opportunity to engage with participant ideas and also created a more comprehensive case from each participant's perspective and beliefs. These interviews were also purposefully sequenced using Seidman's (1991) recommendations. Multiple interviews also built on information provided during primary interviews. Questions about what ideas and beliefs changed over time were also assessed through repeated interviews. In summary, repeated interviews were another way of ensuring qualitative validity of the study (Creswell, 2008).

Limitations

Although qualitative research does have the strength of examining local understandings and, in some cases, being applicable to local contexts, there were some limitations to conducting

this type of research as well. First, knowledge produced using qualitative designs does not generalize to other populations, or groups. Second, using qualitative research made it difficult to provide quantitative predictions. Lastly, the research was more susceptible to bias and the idiosyncrasies of the research team (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Case study research has the strength of being high in conceptual validity, involving great depth, and often leading to new ideas or hypotheses about a particular phenomenon or idea (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Selection bias and a weak understanding of an occurrence of a phenomenon within the general population, however, are some of the weaknesses of case research as an approach over a quantitative or statistical methodology.

Summary

The current study built on previous studies of special education teacher retention through an examination of how beliefs about disability race and culture and how these contributed to decisions to continue teaching in an urban school district. Although previous research examined special education retention in urban districts through case study methodology, the role of beliefs about disability and culture/race has been relatively ignored (Billingsley, 2007).

Using a case study methodology, special education teachers who taught in an urban district were interviewed at several points in the school year and were given prompts for reflection journals. These sources of data were then compiled into text format and became qualitative case studies. Each participant served as his or her own bounded system (Stake, 1995). From these case studies, cross case analysis was compiled through coding to generate categories and, eventually, broad themes (Saldana, 2012) about how beliefs influenced retention of special education teachers in an urban school district.

After coding and data analysis generated descriptive case studies, implications for teacher preparation as well as in-service professional development and support were discussed. This

study, therefore, aimed to inform both teacher preparation programs and in-service professional development programs for special education teachers working in urban classrooms. It also attempted to examine the bridge between special education teacher beliefs about disability, culture and race and intention to continue to teach in urban school district. Beliefs may also be an important key to understanding how to improve support systems for teachers of students from culturally and racially diverse backgrounds with disabilities in urban districts.

Chapter 4: Case Studies

The purpose of this chapter was to provide detailed, illustrative information about each of the five participants of this study. Specifically, this chapter includes (a) a general description of each participant; (b) a description of each participant's expressed beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, thoughts, and philosophical stances towards disability, race, and culture ; (c) a description of each participant's intersectional beliefs and attitudes regarding disability, race, and culture, and (d) a description of each participant's beliefs and their overall decisions about whether they stay in their teaching placement and/or the urban district of interest. It also includes a cross-case analysis, highlighting themes across the five special education teachers. These cases represent how each of these special education teacher participants construct their beliefs around disability, race, and culture and how these beliefs influenced their overall decisions about whether to stay in their teaching placements and/or district.

Nick Harlan

At the time of this study, Nick Harlan was a 30 year-old special education teacher who identifies as a white, male and comes from a middle-class background. He entered the field of special education through an alternative licensure program called The New Teacher Project (TNTP)[4]. At the time of data collection, Nick was in his 5th year of teaching in an elementary, inclusive special education program in Rockport. Prior to joining the field of special education, Nick completed a Bachelor's degree in creative writing and concurrently worked at JumpStart[5].

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[4]The New Teacher Project was formed in 1997 with the mission of "giving poor and minority students equal access to effective teachers" (TNTP website). For the first 10 years, TNTP was led by Michelle Rhee, and claimed to help improve urban districts through the hiring and training of new teachers (TNTP website).

[5] Jumpstart is a national early education organization that recruits and trains college students and community Corps members to serve preschool children in low-income neighborhoods (JumpStart website).

He was also working as a parking valet part-time. Nick did not have any additional experiences working in the field of education before joining Rockport through TNTP.

Nick explained that he joined the field of special education, mostly through fate and chance. When he applied to alternative licensure programs such as Teach for America and TNTP, he did so with the desire to "serve a high need community." Specifically, on the application forms for the TNTP program, Nick checked boxes for interest in teaching all subject areas and was placed in special education by the program. When Nick was assigned to special education, he also noted that his desire to work with students with more significant disabilities stemmed from the same overall need to "serve a high need area" or field within education. Nick mentioned that he felt that he was "guided by the circumstances of his desire and the opportunities that were available" to work with students with significant disabilities in Rockport.

When asked about his rationale for teaching within the large, urban district in which he was a teacher, Nick mentioned that he primarily chose to work in this district because it was familiar to him. While he did not live in the neighborhood where he taught, he did mention that the city in which the Rockport resides is one which he knew of and near where he and his wife were living at the time. He said that his knowledge of the city in which Rockport was located was "superficial knowledge" but that he had a few friends living there and also had been to several events in the area.

As part of the TNTP program, and in conjunction with the district, Nick was provided with a temporary teaching license while he worked at a local university to obtain a credential for working within special education. Therefore, he was concurrently earning his teaching certification while he was working in the classroom. Nick explained that this meant full-time teaching and part-time coursework. He recalled that it was "stressful…and daunting, and a three

year process" including a lot of "late nights of prepping" to become initially certified in special education. Nick also felt, however, that entrance into the field of special education would not have been possible for him in a traditional special education teacher education program. For him, the TNTP program provided a window into working with a high need population in a high need teaching area.

Beliefs about Disability

Nick's expressed beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives about disability stemmed from several sources of experiences throughout the course of his life. In particular, Nick had limited experiences with individuals with disabilities outside of the school setting, except for an early experience he recounts from childhood. Among his key sources of beliefs about disability, therefore, Nick included his university teacher preparation program, the overall community at his school (especially some of his general education colleagues), his TNTP cohort program, his personal experiences growing up, and his students.

Teacher preparation program. In his credentialing program, Nick recalled that he was able to learn a lot about inclusion and inclusive practices, particularly the philosophical grounding for inclusive education as well as different systems to support and organize an inclusion program. The professors in his program also provided on-site support through field supervision. They worked closely with him to support him within his program and his development as a new teacher. He recalled that one of his field instructors would "come to [the school] and get to the root of the issues" he was having around challenging behavior or implementation of inclusive best practices.

While his university supervisor and other individuals from his credentialing program were strong sources of sustainable support, Nick found that some of his coursework was not well

organized and that the sequence of courses was not enough to provide a strong foundation, particularly in his content courses such as math and reading instruction. He remarked that "one class for math was just not enough."

Overall, however, Nick believed that his teacher education program provided him a way of "prepar[ing] [him] for the philosophical points of [the] inclusion" of individuals with disabilities in general education school and community settings. This suggests that Nick's core belief about the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in general education spaces stemmed from being in a teacher education program which supported that philosophy.

General education faculty and school community. In addition to his training and mentoring, Nick explained that he learned a lot from working closely with general education teachers at his school. In fact, Nick continually mentioned how important it was that he had a strong school community as part of his continued presence in his teaching placement. Nick attributes his persistence in the district and the field on his relationship with general education peers who provided him with information on how to do "content instruction, how to teach a good lesson about fractions, how to teach phonics." He also noted that the relationship was reciprocal; while the general educators "taught [him] how to teach the basic content… [he] could help them with modifications and accommodations."

This reciprocal relationship was important in highlighting Nick's overall perspectives about disability because it helped him in supporting his students with disabilities. As mentioned above, Nick felt that his content knowledge in teaching methods was somewhat limited and his relationships with general education teachers afforded him with this information. Furthermore, his knowledge of modifications and accommodations through the inclusive philosophy provided by his credential program enabled him to also support students who were not on his caseload and

build a presence within his school as a teacher who could support students with and without identified disabilities.

Additionally, Nick's school staff was also communal, participating in Friday socials and even had a wellness session once a week which included mind-body exercises. At the time of data collection, Nick also had a good relationship with the school psychologist who supported him in learning how to conduct assessments and provided strategies to support students' social/emotional needs. Thus, Nick built supportive, reciprocal relationships with general education teachers and school staff. These relationships supported him both professionally and socially as a new teacher and were important components in building his confidence about working with students with a variety of academic and social needs as well as promoting a support structure to foster his retention.

The New Teacher Project program. While his credentialing program and school community were both strong sources of support for him and personally informed his beliefs and attitudes about working with students with disabilities, Nick didn't feel that the TNTP program training was as effective for him with respect to working in an inclusive special education program. He believed that "it was guided more towards preparing a [segregated] classroom teacher…and the strategies provided didn't really work for [him]." The program did not align with his own personal philosophy of providing inclusive opportunities to students with disabilities and did not provide him with specific strategies to work in inclusive special education environments. What he learned from TNTP was "setting up [his] classroom and creating lesson plans and prepping unit plans." While he acknowledged this was useful information, he lamented that "this was not really how *[his]* day-to-day looked like" in practice. For instance, he really needed more training in terms of strategies for working with and training instructional

support staff members who were often supporting students with disabilities in his program or how to support small group instruction and modify general education work for learners with additional needs. Furthermore, Nick found that TNTP "was vague about how the inclusion program is gonna work." He acknowledged that "they can't prepare you for every situation, they can only teach you the skills that most teachers need." But he also indicated that he "did not feel as prepared to write an IEP as … [he] thought [he] could have [been]," a fundamental skill for all special educators. Nick's description of the TNTP indicated that they were not as committed to inclusion for students with disabilities as his credentialing program. Given his own stance about including individuals with disabilities in general education classrooms as well as his elementary school program, Nick did not find the TNTP as effective in preparing him to work with students with disabilities.

The TNTP program used a "gradual release" model of field work for training its' teachers. Nick commented that during the first few weeks, the information that cohort members received was mostly delivered in a classroom. For the remainder of the training program, which lasted a total of 6 weeks, Nick and his partner were in schools for longer periods of time each week and taking on more responsibilities in terms of lead instruction in a class of students with significant disabilities. Nick liked the partner model for lead teaching, which provided opportunities to reflect with a cohort member who also beginning teaching. Feedback was given during these weeks by a lead facilitator for different cohorts some of whom were former participants of TNTP or Teach for America. Nick mentioned that the extent to which this person would discuss disability within the classroom context varied by individual. His own facilitator only spoke about the 13 categories of disability and gave some examples of traits that might fall under particular categories. Given the duration of the program, Nick mentioned that there was

not a whole lot of time to reflect on students' disabilities and talk more deeply about differences

in abilities both within the context of the classroom instruction or teaching practice. The

majority of reflection came from having a co-teaching partner who was also going through the

program.

Long-term, however, the person that Nick partnered with for that first student teaching

experience moved to another city and therefore, wasn't a sustainable source of support for him.

Indeed, many individuals from the initial cohort of alternative certification programs like TNTP

and TFA tend to leave teaching after the first 2-3 years in the district (Heilig & Vasquez, 2010;

Larabee, 2010). Lack of preparation as well as only needing to commit to a total of 2 years in

the district both are contributors to this statistic (Larabee, 2010). Nick cites that his credentialing

program was a stronger source of support for him, both short and long-term, and a contributor to

his overall persistence in the district as well as solidifying his own philosophy of inclusion.

During his first few years in the district, Nick also had support from a district assigned

teaching mentor. The mentor was someone who had been a teacher in the district for several

years and could help him with tangible resources, as well as overall problem-solving when

working with students with disabilities. Often times, a district mentor would be someone who

had gone through an alternative certification program like Teach for America or TNTP (Larabee,

2010). In this tradition, after 3 years of teaching and earning his initial credential, Nick was also

asked by the credentialing university to serve as a Master teacher for incoming new teachers.

Thus, at the time of the data collection, Nick was working as a mentor for new teachers entering

the district and also completing their credentialing programs; most likely through the same

TNTP program and worked to shape new teachers beliefs about inclusive education for students

with disabilities. Nick viewed serving as a mentor positively and explained that it helped keep

him "in line with current practices and the most recent developments in the field…they bring a lot of fresh ideas, like the current ideas about best practices." Borko and Mayfield (1995) explain that cooperating teachers and university supervisors' experiences working with new teachers can sometimes enhance their own experiences and shape teacher beliefs and perspectives. For Nick, his experiences as a mentor teacher meant that he could also learn from supporting new teachers and it motivated him to continue to employ best practices in his teaching.

In sum, Nick was not necessarily concerned with the expedited length of the program or the fact that his mentors were often individuals who were trained for very few years beyond himself, but he felt that the program could have prepared him better for some of the facets of an inclusive model of special education and in terms of "writing an IEP." The program was important, however, in providing his first exposure to the school district and students with significant disabilities within the classroom context, and therefore contributed to his beliefs, attitudes and overall views about disability through the experience.

Personal background and experiences with disability. Nick briefly had personal experiences with individuals with disabilities before entering the field of special education. Reflecting back on his own education and background, Nick recalled that he didn't have a very easy time in high school. Many of his friends were surprised that he became a teacher given his poor secondary educational performance; but everyone around him was fairly supportive of the decision to teach. In his immediate family, Nick is the first person to become a special education teacher. Often, he reflected back on his experiences in school when thinking about disability and differences.

Growing up, Nick had a childhood friend whose brother had Muscular Dystrophy (MD)[6].

Nick remembered that his friend's family was very caring and supportive of their son with MD

and "did everything they could to ensure that he lived life to the fullest." He saw this positive

first experience as his "first model" for "seeing someone support someone with differences…"

As he thought back to that time, he noted that he "knew what his life was like at home, but

wonder[ed] what his program was like, I wonder what opportunities he had for inclusion or what,

how they, what they worked on with him for communication, functional skills and stuff like

that." Nick also wondered what his IEP might have looked like.

Students on caseload. Finally, one of the greatest sources of Nick's beliefs, views, and

attitudes about disability stemmed from his own experiences as a special education teacher in an

inclusive classroom. It was through these experiences that Nick formed concrete ideas about

how individuals with disabilities should be treated within the school context and community.

Specifically, Nick focused on the importance of providing appropriate supports and services to

students with disabilities within a general context and how labels, while initially helpful in

determining what kinds of supports a student might need, could be less useful once a relationship

develops with the student.

> I think there are... certain characteristics that go with different learning types. Before you
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> meet a student...it can be [used to] prepare myself to rule out certain things and [consider]
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> certain things because I know that in general these techniques work well for students with
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> [an] intellectual disability. However, I think it's only useful for so long, once you've
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> developed a relationship with a student... the information you get from that particular
>
> student is gonna be so beyond generalities…

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[6] Muscular dystrophy includes a group of muscle diseases that tend to effect the musculoskeletal system and make movement difficult (R H Brown Jr., J R Mendell (2005). *Harrison's Principles of Internal Medicine.*p. 2527. doi:10.1036/0071402357.).

Nick's views of disability and special education suggested that he thought most often about how individuals with disabilities were supported within the school context. He specifically subscribed to the philosophy of inclusion and strongly supported opportunities to provide students with services within a general education context whenever possible. He also worked reciprocally with school staff to create these opportunities. Therefore, Nick's own philosophy about disability centered on the school context. When asked about his thoughts about meeting a person with a visible disability in the larger community, for example, Nick tended to go back to the school context and "wonder[ed] about the person's education plan and goals while they were in school." Within the school context, however, Nick harbored more progressive beliefs about including all students with disabilities in general education settings and providing all students with supports that best meet their needs within the context of the general education, local school.

Beliefs about Race and Culture

The majority of Nick's beliefs, views, and attitudes about race and culture stemmed from his work with his students. While Nick reflected on his own background and experiences in relation to his students and how he understood their racial and cultural identities, he spent more time in his interviews and journal prompts thinking about the differences between his students' home cultures and their school cultures and what kinds of ideas are brought from home to school; especially for students entering kindergarten/starting school. Specifically, Nick's thoughts about race and culture were influenced by his interactions with students' home and school behavior, families, the work he has done with positive behavior intervention support (PBIS) in his school, and, briefly, his school mentorship program where he had requirements to make home visits and interview family members of his students.

Students' school and home culture. When Nick was asked about his views about race and culture, he tended to refer heavily to his connections with the students' home and school culture. He mentioned two examples in which home culture and school culture may vary for his students. Both examples, however, are centered on stereotypically negative behaviors such as "calling out" or "retaliating physically."

> In a student's home it may be culturally appropriate to call out for attention, while at school it is culturally appropriate to raise your hand to signal that you need attention. At home it may be culturally appropriate to retaliate physically if someone pushes you or hits you, while at school it may be culturally appropriate to report to an adult that someone has pushed or hit you.

In some ways, these two behaviors illustrate Nick's thoughts about the intersections of race and culture. While he does not say so explicitly in the above quote, there is an assumption in Nick's discussion of home and school culture that he is discussing Black males, which are often the source of stereotypes regarding aggressive behaviors (Carby, 1998; Fujioka, 1999; Sue & Sue, 1990).

Families of students. Building connections with, and learning about families, however, was something Nick still thought was important. He spent time cultivating rich and meaningful relationships with families of his students, which tended to go beyond "negative communication" that was traditionally associated with calling home. Instead, Nick mentioned that he believed in "regular communication and check-ins." The focus of that "communication [was not about] something negative." Instead he used this check-in to talk about "what [the class was] working on in school" and to check and see how [the family] were supporting [the student] with that at home." Nick explained that he thought that he "could never be culturally fluent in everybody's

culture" and indicated that he might never "understand… the entirety of your culture or the history of your culture...all the different practices and whatnot." However, he believed that "the quickest way to someone else's culture is through their family." He used relationship building with families to get a "window" into their lives and backgrounds. Through these windows he learned "as much as [he could] from their family about what motivates them...about what they're interested in." Nick's relationship building also reflected his belief that he should connect his work at school with what was happening at home. As a result, he used the "windows" to learn from parents "what works for them when they're teaching their child, if they're showing them how to do something," what "motivates" particular students, and how to best foster these areas of interest within school.

Working with the school on PBIS. Nick was also involved in school on the Positive Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS) team. When asked about his thoughts on issues such as the achievement gap and overrepresentation within special education, Nick cited how his work on PBIS shaped the way he thought about issues of achievement as it relates to race.

Nick believed that the move to PBIS was, in part, the result of the fact that "there's … [a discouraging] amount of African American males [who] are suspended and often get referrals." He pointed out that there is "no arguing" with the statistics that show the extent of the problem. He attributed the problem to the fact "that there are clearly some cultural differences between... how some students operate…in the classroom...and how some teachers set up the expectations for how students operate in the classroom." He used the example of the acceptance of "calling out" at school being inconsistent with school expectations "because the classroom's about managing expectations and behaviors so the students can stay on task." As he talked about this example, he noted " that kind of small difference … becomes like a point of conflict...that leads

to the student...being sent out for being defiant... that's a popular word...or disruptive." He indicated that this conflict contributed to the reasons so many "African American males are coming to school and are being sent out of their classrooms at a much higher rate than...than any other...group of students in the school" As a result, he believed "there's a lot of work to be done in that area."

Unfortunately, Nick he felt he could not "speak to the larger picture of … what may be going on behind that." While he his PBIS work and his teacher education training helped him see that something was happening to African American boys in public schools, he was unable to articulate what was going on in great detail other than his references to the fact that there might be issues related to teacher expectations. Instead, he fell back to his original statements of home versus school culture, seeing problems with "those students." This is best illustrated by his references to the work that Rockport was putting into PBIS: "I see a lot of good people working hard to identify strategies that will help us "better support...those students."

Mentorship program and assignments. Finally, Nick also mentioned that part of his ideas about race and culture came from his district mentorship program and the credentialing requirement to make a home visit. Nick explained that although he should be doing more home visits, saying, "I'll be honest … I should...do it more often especially cuz I'm a special education teacher." I don't have like 30 kids." He pointed out that he derived benefit from the visits he had conducted, indicating "it's awesome it's really good, you develop like a great relationship." He also believed that these visits facilitated his work with his students because they gave him "an idea of … what motivates students...cuz [he] see[s] their home environment...and that's where like a lot of motivators are gonna be." He also acknowledged that home visits helped him address issues related to generalization... thinking about what students are learning at school...

[and] how they can take that home... The clearer your picture is...of their home...the easier it is for you to kind of reference that...and teach them how they can take that skill home." Despite the acknowledged benefits, Nick's communication with families happened mostly through phone conversations, IEP's and through his mentorship program assignments, which required a home visit. As a result, while Nick maintained positive relationships with his families, he was more likely to do so through the school context than outside of it.

Nick's beliefs, attitudes, and overall views about race and culture seemed to ascribe to a slightly deficit-based model with respect to African American male students. As seen in his reflection about home and school culture for "those students," he seemed to generalize that African American males tend to have issues related to discipline and behavior and that PBIS acted as a solution to those issues. While PBIS is a positive tool for many classrooms and students (Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010), within this particular context, Nick had a difficult time understanding the root causes and/or historical context of the negative behaviors for some of the students from African American backgrounds and/or issues around overrepresentation within special education.

Intersectionality of Beliefs

Nick's beliefs, attitudes, views, and thoughts about disability, race, and culture intersect along several lines. Predominantly, Nick mentioned this intersection in terms of his interactions and involvement with the families of his students with disabilities. Specifically, Nick spoke about connecting and being involved in community activities and events in which his students' families were involved. While Nick seemed to think carefully about families and the language and cultural differences of families of his students, he remained fairly uncertain about the root causes of higher suspension and disciplinary rates among African American males. Thus, he

remained on a surface level when thinking about some of these issues which intersect disability, race, and culture. Additionally, Nick seldom seemed to think about his own students, except in the context of their families, as racialized individuals. While he gave ample thought to how they might be impacted by their disabilities, especially as many of them had low-incidence disabilities; he never attempted to connect their disabilities with their racial and cultural backgrounds when talking about his own attitudes and experiences in these areas. Instead, Nick seemed to have an easier time talking abstractly about race and cultural issues, citing his practices around community engagement and connecting with families, rather than thinking about how students might internalize their various identities as students with disabilities from racially and culturally non-dominant backgrounds.

Despite this abstract way of expressing his beliefs and views about race and culture, Nick saw a solution to higher suspension and expulsion rates of African American male students in PBIS. He expressed support for using positive behavioral interventions and felt confident in his abilities to implement specific behavioral strategies to support students and intervene before a special education referral might be made. He carried this forward in his decision to remain in the field of education, despite leaving the urban school district.

Beliefs and Retention Decisions

Nick decided earlier in the school year that he would be leaving the Rockport District. To him, one of the most important reasons for his attrition from the district was a family obligation: his wife was having a baby and the two of them wanted to move closer to her family. Despite the move, however, Nick reported that he would continue working in the field of special education in the new city where he and his wife would reside. Throughout his interviews, Nick expressed an interest in PBIS, and his new position involved using PBIS with students with

emotional behavioral disabilities to keep them from being sent to alternative schools. Unlike his job with the inclusive elementary school, this position functions like a resource specialist, where Nick takes students outside the general education setting to provide targeted interventions. When asked about his position, Nick seemed incredibly optimistic about the program and his new district. While Nick did not leave the field of special education, he remarked that his new district appeared to have more resources than Rockport and wouldn't be classified as an urban school district. As mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study, Nick would fall under attrition from urban special education given the definitions set up for this study. It is important to note, however, that Nick continues to be committed to the overall field of special education, especially PBIS and supporting students with challenging behaviors.

Althea Lee Miller

Althea Lee Miller is a 35 year-old special education teacher who identifies as an African American female from a lower, middle-class background. At the time of data collection, Althea was working in a segregated special education program which supported students with learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities, and mild intellectual disabilities in an elementary school. Prior to that, she worked in a segregated program which supported students with more significant disabilities in a different elementary school. Originally from the community in which she was teaching, Althea entered the field of special education through a series of educational experiences and having a family member who inspired her to pursue teaching. After high school, Althea joined an AmeriCorps program based in South Carolina. She described it as a "domestic Peace Corps" program where she worked with a cohort of volunteers in a classroom based volunteer project. After that, Althea went to do another volunteer position in Atlanta,

Georgia through the Hands on Atlanta[7] program. At the completion of her work with Hands on

Atlanta, Althea decided to stay in Atlanta to earn an associate's degree taking a series of general

courses. At this time she "didn't know what she wanted to do." Despite this, she continued to

work in the education sector through the YMCA program in Atlanta. Shortly afterwards, she

came back to her home state where she began to volunteer in her aunt's special education class.

The experiences of working with her aunt solidified her own interest in working in special

education within her own neighborhood.

Althea decided to earn her Bachelor's degree locally and worked as a teacher's aide to

gain educational experience in the district of interest. Althea applied for and later joined The

New Teacher Project (TNTP) program (a few years before Nick) as a means to obtain her special

education teacher certification. She had mixed feelings about the TNTP program, saying that it

was "good preparation….but not for some people." For herself, Althea felt the TNTP program

was sufficient given her background, growing up in the neighborhood she would be teaching in,

and her earlier experiences working as an aide in the district. She believed, however, that

individuals, who did not have these kinds of early experiences, may not have been as prepared to

enter the district and work in special education. She mentioned how she "could sorta tell…that

[other TNTP teachers] wouldn't make it."

Beliefs about Disability

Like Nick, the majority of Althea's beliefs, attitudes, and experiences about disability

stemmed from her background and experiences in special education and the field of education

more broadly. Althea had limited experiences working interacting with individuals with

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[7] Hands On Atlanta helps individuals, families, corporate and community groups strengthen Greater Atlanta through service at more than 400 nonprofit organizations and schools. Hands On Atlanta volunteers are at work every day of the year tutoring and mentoring children, helping individuals and families make pathways out of poverty, improving Atlanta's environment, and more. Hands On Atlanta is an affiliate of the Hands On Network, an association of 250 volunteer service organizations across 16 countries.

disabilities outside of the context of special education. Specifically, Althea mentioned several key sources of her beliefs, attitudes, and ideas about disability including: (1) her personal background and experiences with disability (working as a paraprofessional and her aunt's support), (2) access to services for students with disabilities, (3) the TNTP program, and (4) students on her caseload

Personal background and experiences. Althea first began to think about disability while working as a special education paraprofessional in a Rockport elementary school. She believes this work provided her with the background and context that prepared her for working as a special education teacher. Specifically, supporting students with significant disabilities in special education classrooms shaped Althea's thoughts about providing care *for* individuals with disabilities, rather than increasing independence.

Additionally, Althea mentioned that her aunt was a huge source of support during the first year, helping her set up "her first classroom." Althea's aunt was a general education teacher who had students with disabilities in her class. Growing up, Althea would sometimes volunteer in her aunt's classroom, thereby providing her exposure to the educational setting as well as individuals with disabilities. Althea mentioned that her aunt was like a mentor to her while she was beginning her teacher education program, and was so proud that Althea passed the qualifying examinations for her to teach in the state of California. "She was braggin' cuz like people don't normally pass all three parts and I did sooo…." Althea's aunt, as well as her experiences working in Hands on Atlanta and her time spent as an aide to the handicapped, all supported her early philosophy towards disability. Specifically, thinking about her role as a caregiver in students with disabilities educational experiences, stayed with her throughout her time as a special education teacher and informed her decision to leave the field.

Services and access. Althea thought very carefully about disability and access to supports and services for students with disabilities. Specifically Althea's views about disability were informed by the caregiver perspective she held and her thoughts about how this intersected with who received particular supports and services. In particular, Althea shared the example of how one of her students who had seizures infrequently received an individualized nurse and how it was "very interesting that [one student] even has a nurse… cuz a lot of kids who are even more severe than him don't…but that's fine you know, and so basically they could have a new nurse"

One of the main issues that Althea had with the nurse and the overall system in special education had to do with access. Althea thought very carefully about who had access to certain resources. Althea believed that there were inconsistencies in the system of special education which provided only some of the students with needed supports. She highlighted a major issue around access and advocacy for disability and disability services; namely that those with the cultural capital in schools were able to access services; sometimes even services that were not necessary for educational access. Althea explains that "it's not clear who gets a 1:1" for instance.

While Althea thought about access to particular supports like 1:1 instruction and medical attention, she seemed to think about these services and supports within the structure of a segregated setting for students with disabilities and still within the caregiver framework. While an inclusive educational model often tends to suggest more universal supports for students with disabilities within the general education setting, Althea tended to operate in a caregiver mindset of giving students with disabilities more adult supports, like 1:1 instruction, and felt frustration about one of her students receiving medical support while another was not.

The New Teacher Project program. Althea's first teaching experiences with students with disabilities, aside from her role as a paraprofessional, were realized through the TNTP program. Althea's overall knowledge about disability was, therefore, shaped through the training, instruction and experiences she received through the TNTP program. Althea taught special education in the Rockland while concurrently working towards her teacher certification in special education. When asked about TNTP and her certification process, Althea recognized that her experiences with the program were very different from the experiences of her peers in the program. Althea was confident in her ability to work in a classroom with students with disabilities *and* to lead instruction coming into the program. She believed that her experiences as someone who was previously a paraprofessional in the district coupled with her community connections prepared her to go through the alternative certification program. She felt that TNTP "portrayed [teaching] like, you can come from any field and do this." She didn't agree. She believed that that brief level of preparation TNTP was not something every person could go through and be prepared to teach. The confidence Althea had going through the TNTP program, shaped her beliefs about working with individuals with disabilities, and she continued to utilize the caregiver role which was shaped through her initial educational experiences. In Althea's case, the experiences and instruction provided by the TNTP program perpetuated the beliefs Althea held about individuals with disabilities within the educational context.

Students on her caseload. Although Althea's interviews suggested that she did not have strong views, beliefs, or attitudes about disability or about working in special education, her journal entries suggested that she did strongly believe in her students. She was particularly clear about her desire to ensure that "all students should be included in the school community." Inclusion in the school community focused on participating "in all assemblies and field trips with

their same age peers." She did not take this participation as a given. In fact, she believed that "in order for this to occur the school community must embrace those students with disabilities as well as their typically aged peers." She also believed that she and her staff were responsible for encouraging student participation in the school community activity. She said that her students and the adults in her classroom have a mantras, "You can do it, don't give up." Despite Althea's belief that her students should be included in "assemblies and field trips with same aged peers," she believed that her students with identified disabilities belonged in a separate classroom for their academic instruction. Therefore, Althea's philosophy of disability centered on her interest in the social inclusion of her students with disabilities while maintaining a caregiver stance towards instruction and academic supports. When asked about how she might respond to an individual with a disability in the community, she would wonder about the "services they received while in school." Therefore, Althea's attitudes and beliefs about disability also centered on her experiences within the school context.

Beliefs about Race and Culture

Althea's beliefs about race and culture illustrate her own lived experiences as a person of color. She thinks deeply about how race and culture serve as mechanisms through which individuals are segregated and marginalized. As someone who grew up and continued to live in the community in which she worked, Althea understands the ways in which systems of oppression directly impact communities of color. Althea's key sources of beliefs about race and culture stem from (a) her own lived experiences as a person of color, (b) her education through college, and (c) the overall school community where she worked as a special education teacher.

Lived experiences. Although Althea didn't say as much as some of the other participants with respect to her beliefs and attitudes about race and culture, what she did say

spoke volumes about her own experiences, how the system perpetuates inequities, and how some factors such as socioeconomic status, race and culture intersect.

Althea's lived experiences as a person of color led her to think differently about the term "urban". In my interview with Althea, I asked her about how she felt about working in an urban school district and she responded by saying that her conception of the term 'urban' was different than my own. While I spoke of the term urban as something removed or distanced, Althea informed me that she doesn't "look at [teaching] in terms of urban, it looks like home." Althea grew up in the community in which she teaches and lived around a community which she was very much a part of racially, culturally, socially, and economically. Her conception of the district in which she worked and the students with whom she worked was a personal experience for her. Thus, Althea's perspectives on race and culture, stemmed from her own experiences of growing up as a person of color in the urban context.

College. College was where Althea had opportunities to examine her own racial and cultural background more deeply. While living as a person of color in the urban context was one source of her beliefs of race and culture, going to college and examining how the overall system works to segregate people of color and how this connects with history was something she became more aware of in college, saying "when I got to college it got so depressing … like learning about how this shit really work."

Althea connected the structural inequalities she saw in schools in her neighborhood to historical treatment of non-dominant groups. She also connected this with ideas of success and who is successful in society. Therefore, Althea thought about the overall historical and socio-cultural context of race. As she said, "who designs the laws? … It's all been set up...for a certain group of people to succeed... All these other groups are just tryin' to fall in... [They ask], "well

why are you like that?" We had a lengthy conversation about how slavery and marginalization of particular groups across history, "just retrace everything...back to slavery...back to the middle passage, … they've been playin' catch up since then, … they took the land from the Mexicans... just like the Native Americans and everything else." She believed that these historical patterns led to generations of "broken families" and how it "takes even longer to get out of this stuff." Althea even compared this to modern day society, citing examples from the way Fox News portrays Black people to the scandal with Donald Sterling. Althea had strong beliefs about race and culture, particularly as they related to society and her own life.

School community. Additionally, Althea connected her beliefs about race and culture to her teaching and her students. She highlighted that sometimes behaviors are perceived as culturally specific within society. She gave the example of how individuals within the same environment may have similar behaviors based on "attitudes and mentality." She indicated that although there are some stereotypes made of people of particular racial and cultural backgrounds having certain kinds of behaviors, "Asians can be perceived as more timid, or lack eye contact," sometimes environments contribute to certain behaviors. She described this as, "I would say also with urban versus rural, if you have some cultures that grew up in the hood or the ghetto, they have the same traits, as the same folks of a culture raised in the same circumstance, which includes the attitudes and mentality." Althea went on to cite examples from the "urban ghetto" where there may indeed be collective thoughts on how individuals should be acting.

Althea complicated an already difficult question. While it is easy to think of moving beyond stereotypical notions of how particular groups of people of a certain cultures or racial backgrounds act, Althea suggests that the environment and group culture may also have strong influences.

Intersectionality of Beliefs

Althea's beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives about disability, race, and culture intersect through her awareness and understanding of the achievement of African American students and the over representation of African American males within special education. She connected these issues with the larger systemic issue of the continued marginalization of people of color in society and the historical segregation of people of color through slavery and oppression. Althea specifically identified that her own classroom had mostly African American males and recognized that her classroom makeup paralleled many urban special education classrooms (Artiles, 2013). She also recognized that the majority of the students with whom she works are identified as EBD; a disability category in which Black males are often overrepresented (Oswald & Coutinho, 2001). Despite being concerned about marginalization and over-representation, Althea didn't necessarily make the leap to say that there should be more overall inclusion for her students with disabilities. While Althea believed in the social inclusion of her students with disabilities, she believed that their academic work should be in a structured, segregated environment to best meet their needs.

Beliefs and Retention Decisions

Althea's overall decision at the end of the school year was to leave the district and special education. She did, however, continue to work in a context very similar to the Rockport school district as an afterschool program coordinator. Althea explained that one of the reasons she chose to leave the traditional classroom teaching was that the growth of her students was seen as too "linear" and that she felt constrained by all the federal mandates associated with public schools. In afterschool programming, Althea felt she had opportunities to provide students with wraparound services that are tailored their social/emotional and academic needs without the fear

of being dismissed for not making appropriate academic gains or feeling constrained by the need to keep pace with a particular curriculum.

Althea has beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives about race and culture such that she continues to support students of color in a large, urban context. Although she may still support some students with disabilities, she decided to move out of special education because of systemic requirements. Her attachment to working with students with disabilities was not necessarily as strong as her desire to work with communities of color. As a result, she continued to work within an urban school district outside of the field of special education.

Stacey Keiser

At the time of the data collection for this study, Stephanie Keiser was a 35-year old special education teacher who identifies as a white female from a middle-class background. During the time of interviews and journal reflection prompts, she had been working in the district of interest for about 7 years at both the middle school and high school levels, supporting students with significant disabilities in inclusive educational settings. Stacey began teaching in the district of interest after a series of courses in psychology led her to an on-site research center at her undergraduate institution that supported students with autism. During her undergraduate degree years, she worked at the center, which also involved working in classrooms around the area in which only students with Autism were present. She also studied abroad in London working for a school for students with special needs. At the time, Stacey was working towards an English degree, but also taking psychology coursework in child development. Stacey eventually changed majors and graduated with an undergraduate degree in psychology, with a specialization in applied behavior analysis. Stacey described her interest in special education teaching as "something [she's] naturally able to do." Stacey mentioned that she felt especially

confident in her ability to work with students with disabilities because of some of the characteristics she felt special education teachers should have. "I just think I'm naturally calm and patient."

Stacey's knowledge and expertise in Applied Behavior Analysis provided her with the skills to work well with students with significant disabilities. For a short time, Stacey worked as a paraprofessional in the state of New York, and then eventually moved to California to begin working as a behavioral specialist for a consulting firm. She eventually came into the district as a paraprofessional, much like a few of the other participants. As a paraprofessional, Stacey recalled one of the parents of the students she supported remarking that she should "be a teacher….you should go to [a university program] …because they do a great job at inclusion."

Initially, when Stacey first entered the district of interest, she was interested in working with elementary school students. However, through a series of courses and experiences, she was placed in a co-teaching environment with another new teacher during the student teaching segment of her program. Basically, the teacher education program was set up so that teacher candidates went through a series of field experiences including two placements in a middle school environment and one in a fully inclusive elementary program. During the third year of the program, teacher candidates have the option of being interns, who worked as fully employed teachers within the district while completing the last requirements of their program without being fully credentialed teachers. Therefore, Stacey and her co-teacher, who were job-sharing in the district of interest, decided to stay in their positions permanently and complete their intern year through their own teaching assignment. The program was an "inclusive" middle school in the district which had not been following the guidelines of truly inclusive schooling under the previous special education teacher. Therefore, with the help of her co-teacher, Stacey helped set

up a fully inclusive special education program at the middle school, which served students with a variety of academic, social, and functional needs.

As Stacey worked with her co-teacher to set up a strong inclusion program at the middle school where they job shared, she also decided to concurrently complete her Master's degree. Stacey mentioned, however, "that the reality is that the first year of teaching is really hard." Thus, although she was close to completion, Stacey decided that she would rather "do a good job setting up her classroom and being a good teacher," and decided to take a break from her Master's degree.

After three to four years of working with a co-teacher, the district recommended splitting up the two teachers and having one of them move to teaching in a high school classroom, helping to set up an inclusion program. At the time of this split, Stacey's co-teacher was in the middle of a pregnancy and knew that she would be taking maternity leave for some portion of time. The pregnancy made it difficult for her co-teacher to take up another job and therefore Stacey participated in the involuntary transfer and was moved to a large, high school. There, she worked to build an inclusive program for students with disabilities who were identified with a variety of support needs.

Stacey takes credit for starting the inclusion program at the high school and broadening the reach of the program. When she started working there, her first year included a caseload of 5-7 students. As of the time of data collection, however, she increased the program to 19 students. Originally, the move was not something that Stacey was excited about, especially given her interest in teaching elementary school. Given the circumstances with her co-teacher, however, she decided to jump in and now "can't imagine teaching elementary school." She

mentioned that she felt that "once you reach a certain maturity level…it would be hard to go back."

Beliefs about Disability

Unlike the other participants, Stacey had experiences working with individuals with disabilities outside of the classroom setting and prior to becoming a special education teacher. While she too had many experiences within special education which shaped her overall beliefs and attitudes about disability, she also had experiences prior to entering the field that shaped her knowledge. Stacey's ideas about disability stemmed from (a) her undergraduate experiences through psychology and applied behavior analysis training; (b) her teacher preparation program; (c) her colleague, Claudia, with whom she co-taught middle school; and (d) the students with whom she works.

Undergraduate degree and training. Stacey's initial interest in special education, grew out of undergraduate coursework and experiences in psychology. After an opportunity presented itself to work with students with autism, Stacey began learning about the benefits of applied behavioral analysis for these students. Stacey described her path to teaching, saying, "I took classes and then learned all about applied behavioral analysis and so I got my bachelor's specializing in applied behavior analysis." As she learned about applied behavior analysis, Stacey began to feel as though something clicked for her. She felt confident about her abilities to work with individuals with challenging behaviors and felt that special education was just a "natural fit." Therefore, initially, Stacey's experiences and beliefs were shaped by her ability to work with students with autism in a clinical setting. Her initial ideas about disability, therefore were shaped by more positivist frameworks, in which she tried to alleviate more challenging behaviors.

Teacher preparation program. Through her credentialing program, Stacey also had opportunities to engage in learning about creating behavioral plans for students with challenging behavior, but she also mentioned that her credentialing program helped her to learn about the philosophy of inclusion, which was used throughout the program. All student practica were in "fully inclusive schools." She described her first year and a half of a three year program as "pretty intense … multiple subjects. [She] went through and did everything you needed to do to be [an]... elementary school teacher. … The second year was... the special ed and part." She described how that portion of the program included practica at all levels and coursework focuses on behavioral assessment and intervention. This content included "breaking down behavior and doing behavior plans every quarter and really looking at all that was involved." The experiences she had in her credential program shifted her overall philosophy about disability from the initial positivistic framework instilled by working with students in a clinical setting. While she could still use applied behavioral analysis and strategies to mitigate challenging behaviors, Stacey realized that these could be utilized for all students and students with disabilities in the general education context.

Co-teacher. Additionally, Stacey strongly credited her former co-teacher with helping to shape her beliefs about disability and working with students with disabilities. Claudia, who she began her teaching experiences with at the middle school, was involved in a job-share role with Stacey. Having had a co-teaching relationship helped Stacey to "reduce stress" especially during her first few years as a new teacher. This arrangement "helped lower the stress that goes with being a first year teacher…that you're doing this all alone and figuring it all out and having that other person kind of doing that with you." Collaborating with Claudia helped her to strengthen her own beliefs about working with students with disabilities. Because they had both attended

the same credentialing program, they both had similar philosophies of inclusive best practices, which they maintained in their years working together. Therefore, Claudia strengthened Stacey's own philosophy about supporting students with disabilities in general education contexts and all of the facets that went along with that role as an inclusive special education teacher.

Students on caseload. Finally, Stacey's attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives were strongly shaped by the students with whom she worked. Stacey mentioned that one of the most "positive things [about the job]" was being able to "support students with disabilities." Co-teaching allowed her to provide needed supports to and advocacy for students who are "identified late as having a disability, or a learning difference...who don't have special ed services." She believed that the school system sometimes overlooked students who might need special education services and supports and she felt that it was important to be able to support and advocate for students in that way. She also believed that having the right supports and services in place would help this population of students to be successful in school. Therefore, Stacey had a unique experience of having worked in a clinical setting with students with disabilities and then shifting to a more inclusive experience working with students with disabilities. These experiences and interactions with individuals with disabilities within the clinical and school context helped shape her overall inclusive philosophy of special education. While she still valued special education and the importance of services and supports such as applied behavior analysis, Stacey also valued opportunities for her students to access general education academic content and social experiences. When asked about how she might react to an individual with a disability in the general population, Stacey replied that she "would wonder what their academic programming was like." Like Nick, this suggests that Stacey too had beliefs

as well as an overall philosophy about disability that was situated mainly in the school context and special education.

Beliefs about Race and Culture

Stacey's overall experiences with racial and cultural differences were influenced by her experiences working with her paraprofessionals, students and families, and her personal beliefs about wanting to live and work in the same community. Her beliefs and attitudes were also influenced by her ability to think carefully about her own background in relation to her students and paraprofessionals. Stacey thought deeply about her own background as a white female from a middle class background and how her own background and experiences shaped her beliefs about race and culture. She particularly had to think about her background in terms of her actions and behaviors when working with students of color and her paraprofessionals from non-dominant backgrounds.

Working with paraprofessionals. In Stacey's special education inclusion program at the high school, she worked with a group of paraprofessionals who supported her students with disabilities with a variety of instructional and self-help skills. The majority of her paraprofessionals were Black females. Therefore, Stacey had to think about her own background as a white female in relation to her paraprofessionals when giving out instructions or leading trainings. At times, Stacey felt that her interactions with her paraprofessionals were strained. She felt that she had difficulty in managing her expectations for them. Particularly, Stacey noticed that her "paraprofessionals…had a harder time maintaining composure when a student [was] being physically aggressive with them or verbally rude." In talking about her paraprofessionals, Stacey tended to use more generalizing statements, such as "they take [student

behavior] personally." Therefore, it appeared as though Stacey tended to generalize the behaviors of her paraprofessionals towards students.

Stacey spoke about how her paraprofessionals "used an angry tone and sometimes placed blame on students." Stacey explained that her approach was usually different from her paraprofessionals such that she used "stern but not angry tone, or even a soft tone of voice with a reminder of ways to behave and consequences." Her description of differences here indicated that she somehow attributed her paraprofessional's aggression to their backgrounds as Black females. Stacey talked about her "white voice" as being different from her paraprofessional's intonation. Specifically, when Stacey referred to her paraprofessionals, she talked about her "white voice" as being "sweet and innocent." She contrasted this by saying that her "white voice" may carry "a different message" than "this African American woman's voice." This othering suggested that Stacey held some prejudiced views of her paraprofessionals' intonation as linked to their race.

Students and families. When asked about the role of race and culture in student achievement, Stacey shifted gears to suggest that "socioeconomic factors play a bigger role…than race and culture." Stacey specifically thought about some of her students who are "new to the country or have parents who are newer to the country" and how they might "not be familiar with the education system and therefore they might not advocate…or might not know what to advocate for, for their child." Stacey connected her work with students with "language barriers" with cultural capital within the education system. She additionally suggested that students and their families might experience "cultural or language barriers" which prevent them from understanding how their "students' needs can be met within the system." Stacey, therefore, understands the issues that traditional school structure may present for students and families

from non-dominant backgrounds. Her mention of cultural capital ties in culture, language as well as socioeconomic status. Stacey saw these as intersecting when it comes to student and family understanding of the dominant education system.

Additionally, Stacey goes on to say that "when it comes to poverty" that typically her "African American [students]...or people of different races or minorities" are in "lower socioeconomic groups" and how that has a "big impact on student achievement." Therefore, she also ties in race and how race intersects with socioeconomic status for many of her students and their families. She also puts the onus on schools and school systems, explaining that "some families have less support when they come to school" and that many "many families are busy working or supporting lots of children" and "have trouble meeting basic needs for their children."

When thinking about her own students, their families and how race and culture may tie into student achievement, therefore, Stacey connects race, culture, language, and socioeconomic status. She understands that some non-dominant groups face challenges in terms of cultural capital and support within the existing education system and makes efforts to understand these positions of difference with her students and their families.

Living in the community. Stacey, like some of the other participants of this study, valued living in the same community in which they worked. For Stacey, this meant proximity to her students' neighborhoods and communities and understanding firsthand what it was like to be a part of those spaces. When her circumstances changed and she and her fiancé moved to another city, Stacey made the decision to find a position which was close to her new community.

"If I had not moved to [that city], I would still be teaching at my current job." Even this change

reflects her desire to "work closer to home and in the community in which [she lives]." She felt

that this was part of the overall job of being truly invested in her school and students.

When Stacey thinks about her students and their families she is sensitive about their

differences in terms of race, culture, language and socioeconomic status. With her students and

their families, Stacey reflects on her own experiences as a white, female and how school systems

may be marginalizing non-dominant groups. With her paraprofessionals, however, Stacey

tended to generalize their voices and aggressive natures towards students with their race as Black

women. Rather than pointing out specific challenges that she had with one or more individual

paraprofessionals, Stacey had a tendency to generalize her paraprofessionals' behaviors.

When thinking about her students and her school community, however, Stacey displays a

deep commitment to living where she worked. Even though she decided to leave her

school/district, Stacey found a way to work in a neighborhood near her new home, thus

highlighting the strength of her commitment. Therefore, with respect to her students, their

families and the school community, Stacey is very reflective and sensitive about the intersections

of race, culture, and language and socioeconomic status. She maintained a strong value of living

near the communities with whom she was working. With some of her adult staff, however,

Stacey had a tendency to generalize behaviors and aggression, which may have also been a part

of her strained relationships with her paraprofessionals.

Intersectionality of Beliefs

Stacey's beliefs, attitudes, and philosophies about disability, race, and culture intersect

along several lines. Predominantly, Stacey thought mostly about the importance of relationships

with families of her students with disabilities when she thought about disability, race, culture

along with language and socioeconomic status. Stacey highlighted the importance of working

closely with the families of her students with disabilities and building strong relationships with

them. Additionally, she recognized that many of the families of her students may have different

ideas or values than those highlighted within the school system and her own training.

Stacey's journal entries reflected that she thought a lot about culture, as did her last

interview about the attitudes and work ethic of her paraprofessional support staff. Many of the

frustrations manifested themselves into different kinds of views about culture and race related to

her students with disabilities versus her paraprofessionals. For example, Stacey was very

sensitive in her understanding of how culture could play into the behaviors of her students, but

also understood that culture was not the *only* factor influencing how her students behaved when

they came to school. She knew that she could not fully explain the behavior of a student by

focusing on their culture and that there were more factors such as "personality type, education,

friend group etc." that may account for differences in behaviors of students. With her

paraprofessionals however, she seemed to do the opposite, linking their behaviors to their

backgrounds as Black women through her discussion of "white voice"…" versus African

American female voice."

Stacey also placed value on the individualization of programs and curriculum for each of

her students with disabilities. Stacey felt strongly about being able to tailor her instruction and

support each of her students with disabilities and their individual development. This

individualization also went into thinking about each student's racial and cultural background and

how their background, as well as other factors of importance such as previous education, friend

circle and family might be influencing their overall behavior and performance in school. For

example, Stacey wrote about one of her students in her journal prompts and how this student's

difficulty in expressing her discomfort about the advances of a male student might have been, in part, due to her upbringing in a traditionally patriarchic household. She knew not to generalize this behavior by simplifying its sole cause as culture, but she also knew not to completely ignore it. Therefore, found ways to address this issue using the cultural context *and* her knowledge of individualizing instruction for students with disability.

Beliefs and Retention Decisions

There were several key factors influencing Stacey's overall attrition from the urban district as a special education teacher. First, Stacey indicated that she had recently relocated to a neighboring city and that the daily commute to work had become inconvenient. She also cited that she strongly believed in working where she lived and therefore took a position in a closer school district. Additionally, Stacey's later journal prompts and interviews indicated that she felt major dissatisfaction with her paraprofessionals at the district and that it contributed to her overall feelings of being stressed and overwhelmed. Finally, Stacey also explained that the new district and her new school were planning on providing her with a higher salary for a similar job. All of these reasons led her to take a position as a special education teacher in a new district. Her district and overall position, however, remained relatively similar. Stacey still worked with individuals from low-income, non-dominant backgrounds in another urban school district as a special education teacher. Her beliefs in continuing to teach where she lived and tailor instruction to individuals with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds translated into her current teaching position as an inclusion teacher in another large urban district.

Rebecca Kingsley

At the time of data collection, Rebecca Kingsley was a 27-year old special education

teacher in the district of interest who identifies as a white, middle-class female. Rebecca joined

the district of interest through the Teach for America (TFA) program as a resource special

education teacher at a school that is part of the Small Schools Initiative[8]. She started working in

the district directly after finishing her undergraduate degree in environmental science at a small

liberal arts university in Vermont. At the time of data collection, Rebecca had been teaching in

the district for 5 years. This was 3 years beyond the 2-year commitment required by Teach for

America. Rebecca explained that one of the things that kept her in the field longer than her

required commitment through TFA was that she has "enjoyed learning about special education,

about the field and interacting with students and other people who work in special education."

Consistent with the TFA program requirements, Rebecca had no previous experiences with

education before entering the special education classroom within Rockport.

Rebecca only had to do one year of part-time coursework to complete her credential

through a structured mentorship program. In partnership with this program, the Rockport district

created an accelerated teacher training program. Rebecca explained that the Rockport district

decided to make an expedited program for Teach for America fellows and others who were

alternatively certified, which allowed them to waive coursework and waive many of the

supervision and practicum requirements typically asked of credential candidates. Rebecca

mentioned that "there was no classes involved…you meet with a coach once a week and then

you have to do a weekly reflection, and then you create a physical binder portfolio, that you put

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[8]Also known as Small Schools Reform, suggests that high schools are too large and should be reorganized into smaller, autonomous schools of no more than 400 students, and optimally under 200. Many private schools of under 200 share design features which draw upon the benefits of organizations of less than 200 people. In the public school version of the Small Schools Movement, students may be given a choice of which small school they want to join (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Small_schools_movement)

together with all these artifacts." TFA fellows served as coaches to other fellows and cleared their credentials for free through this process. Therefore, in conjunction with the Rockport district, the district mentorship program, and the TFA program, Rebecca obtained a clear credential in one year while she was working in the district.

Beliefs about Disability

Rebecca's sources of beliefs and experiences with disability stemmed from several of her own experiences and background. Like the other participants of this study, Rebecca's main frame of reference for thinking about disability came from her school context. Specifically, Rebecca's key sources of beliefs, and attitudes about disability stemmed from (1) accountability mandates, (2) her school community, (3) her personal background and experiences with disability, (4) type of instruction provided (one-to-one and small group), and (5) the students with whom she works.

Accountability mandates. Rebecca seemed to feel some tension during the interviews when she spoke about performance data and special education. She seemed to be in two different minds about her school including students with moderate to severe disabilities. She suggested that she believed that students with all types of support needs would benefit from having access to instruction within her school, saying "we do want to be able to provide students …this space, their community school and neighborhood school … and get the services that are appropriate for them." But she also talked about how this might require more resources than the school had. She worried about resources because "these students … need a lot more." This "more" included special education teachers, counselors, and space. She was also concerned that "a lot of our special ed kids have attendance issues, they have a behavior issue...so you're just… signing up for a lot of effort and energy and money to go to this thing." She also seemed

particularly concerned with how these students would affect the school's performance because "money gets tied to performance."

For students with significant disabilities, however, states allow the use of alternative assessments. Since the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), students with disabilities were required to participate in statewide assessment systems; unless students disabilities were classified as severe (Browder et al., 2004).. Students with more significant disabilities were provided with alternative assessments. Special education performance assessments, however, are not tied to federal funding (Browder et al., 2004). This showed Rebecca's lack of understanding about how her school would be impacted by a caseload of students with significant disabilities. It also suggested that Rebecca viewed special education as a placement rather than specific supports and services tied within instruction. While Rebecca did suggest that there might be a classroom for students with significant disabilities, she did not mention any instance of how and if students with significant disabilities could be included with same-aged peers in her high school. Therefore, Rebecca seemed to think of special education, particularly for students with more significant disabilities in terms of a segregated setting.

School experiences. Rebecca's views about disability stemmed mainly from her experiences working within her school. Because her teacher education program was limited to one year and did not include traditional visits from individuals from different programs or viewpoints, her training did little to contribute to her overall knowledge about disability. Her school community and experiences as a teacher, therefore, were the sole contributors to her overall beliefs and perceptions about disability and special education.

Most of Rebecca's beliefs, attitudes, and ideas revolved around special education *placement* and labeling of students with disabilities. Rebecca talked about changing the

"placements for students," stating that "it's sometimes difficult to find the correct placement for a student." She believed in the continuum of services, both at the district and school levels. She stated that if the continuum of services were available, "we are able to keep students in schools...and keep students in their school communities." Her journal reflections, as well as in-depth interviews, frequently addressed how important it was to find an appropriate placement for a student identified with disabilities and how important it was to provide tailored services. Rebecca also focused on labeling. She believed all her students were correctly identified with their disability label, but that she was also cognizant about how "labels can follow students throughout their lives and influence their futures." Both of these ideas stemmed directly from her work within the Rockport school district.

Students on caseload. Similarly, Rebecca's work with her students also influenced her ideas about disability. Her work with students with disabilities instilled in her the belief that "all students, regardless of their learning differences, can make gains in the classroom and in their personal lives." She said that this belief led her to advocate for her students, pushing at her "school for more special education students to be in general education classes of all levels." She believed that all students could "benefit from being challenged academically with their general education peers" and saw the general education classroom as an opportunity for these students "to show how much they can achieve." Once again, Rebecca underscored the importance of placement within the special education system, though she also illustrated the importance of inclusive education generally when thinking about her students with disabilities. Therefore, Rebecca's students influenced her overall ideas about learning and the capabilities of students with disabilities.

Instructional practice. Rebecca's understanding of instructional practice also influenced her thoughts about disability. She was happy with the time she could spend working individually with students or in small groups. She was satisfied with these arrangements because "working so closely with students has immense benefits for both the students and myself." She benefited from the enjoyment she got from relationship building with students. The students benefitted from these instructional arrangements because they enabled her to "really focus on what their learning needs and gaps are and try different ways of filling those gaps. … They get the individual attention that they really need to understand more challenging concepts." Rebecca further explained that these arrangements helped her provide slightly different instruction and more practice, resulting in greater success. For Rebecca, "working with [her] students in one-on-one settings has really pushed [her] to know that [her] students are capable of doing pretty much anything." Therefore, Rebecca sometimes presented conflicting views about placement of students with disabilities which ranged from being integrated with general education peers or segregated in individualized instruction to meet their needs.

Personal experiences. Finally, Rebecca's beliefs, attitudes, and ideas about disability were influenced by her own personal experiences growing up. She recalled that one of the first experiences that she had with disability included a person in her synagogue who had cerebral palsy. This created her initial view that "disabled" and "special education" mean "people who are physically or severely handicapped." The power of these perceptions cause her to reflect on them as she moved into her own classroom, She said, "I knew … that's not who I would be teaching and that would not be my experience." The differences caused her to think about invisible and visible disabilities and how invisible disabilities created "a whole different challenge." Many of the students with whom Rebecca currently works have high incidence

disabilities. These are sometimes referred to as judgmental disabilities (Artiles, 2013). Rebecca's early experiences seeing individuals with visible disabilities in her community provided this contrast with her current work and led her to think more deeply about disability and how students are identified for special education placement and services.

Therefore, the majority of Rebecca's beliefs and attitudes about disability stemmed from her experiences in the special education program at her high school. While connected her own personal experiences of knowing a person with cerebral palsy with her understanding of visible and invisible disabilities, Rebecca had limited interactions with individuals with disabilities outside of the school setting. When asked about how she might react to seeing a person with a visible disability within a community setting such as the bus, Rebecca replied that "now that [she] is a special education teacher" she would wonder about their "transition out of high school" and what "services they use." This again highlights that her experiences with disability stemmed mostly from the school and educational context.

Beliefs about Race and Culture

Just as many of Rebecca's beliefs and ideas about disability stemmed from personal experiences, both early in her life and in her current teaching placement, her beliefs and attitudes about race and culture also stemmed from her experiences as a special education teacher working in a large, urban school district. As a white woman from a middle class background, Rebecca continues to have to think carefully about her own levels of racial and cultural capital, as well as her class privilege, when she supports students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically non-dominant backgrounds. Reflecting on her own experiences as a teacher, her collaboration with school community members, and the lives of her students have shaped her beliefs and attitudes about race and culture. Specifically, Rebecca's key sources of beliefs, ideas, and

attitudes about race and culture were derived from (1) her interactions with students from non-dominant backgrounds, (2) sharing experiences of her personal background and experiences with her students, (3) her lived experiences as a special education teacher in the Rockport district, and (4) her background and personal experiences with schooling.

Interactions with students. With respect to her ideas about race and culture, Rebecca seems to broadly think about the intersections of race and ability. From her own experiences growing up and her work in the Rockport district, Rebecca recognizes that there is a "disproportionate number of African American males who are labeled as ED." Despite this, however, Rebecca seemed to hold a deficit view about how communities of color prioritize education. She is aware of "stereotypes of my students and their backgrounds," acknowledging that "sometimes my students fall into these stereotypes (in both good and bad ways)." However, she is cognizant that stereotypes don't always describe who the student in, "sometimes my students go against these stereotypes (in both good and bad ways)." She emphasizes that she believes student behaviors are influenced by their communities and believes that community influences are "separate from their ethnic or racial backgrounds." And, while she believes she can use knowledge of her students' community to motivate and challenge them, she believes the community creates challenges that she struggles against. Rebecca indicated that she tries to help her students overcome "outside influences [that] don't necessarily prioritize education." Some of these, like "gang influences" and "easy opportunities to make money" speak about the larger systematic context affecting her work in the classroom, while "influences of the family" seemed to suggest that it is the families who do not prioritize education. However, many families from working-class communities of color *do* prioritize education; sometimes outside of the dominant structure of the school system (Auerbach, 2007).

Sharing with students. Rebecca is very open with her students about her own middle class background and has shared with them that she "went to private school." She acknowledges that her race can influence her behaviors and the perceptions of others, "white girl here." Despite, having a slightly deficit view of the communities and prioritizing of education surrounding her school, Rebecca maintains the ability to share her positionality as a white woman from a privileged background with her students and encourages them to share their stories with her. This indicates that Rebecca is open to learning more about her students racial and cultural backgrounds.

Personal experiences and background. Rebecca felt that early into her life she was aware of racial and class differences. Her parents had cultural capital when it came to the education system, as well as the means, indicating that they "were able to pay for sending me to private school." These factors allowed them to make the informed decision to keep her out of public schools, which were considered failing.   Although Rebecca went to private school, she was still aware the disparities that existed within her community. She believed that situation she experienced growing up created a situation in which "students of color often times aren't given the same educational opportunities as white kids." She attributes the "overabundance of private schools" to race and "desegregation." Believing that "everything's tied to race," she is distressed that she sees similarities in Rockport because "the people who can afford it, send their kids to private school". She sees this split as fracturing the community with "the rest of [the district] [being] left with what's there." She stated that this fracturing ensured that there would not be a "whole community...whole city...investment in the public schools." Instead, she said, "you see like these amazing little elementary schools where parents donate thousands of dollars every year."

As Rebecca talked about her background as a white female from private school in relation to her overall rationale to teach in a large, public, urban school district, she continually referred to her work as a "social justice mission." This is in line with many other TFA corps members, who believe that their work in large, urban districts such as Rockport, are helping to alleviate educational inequities (Ukpokudu, 2007). Indeed, in some ways, Rebecca fell in line with the savior attitude present in many TFA members and individuals with no direct experiences or connections with the school district and community in which they work (Ukpokudu, 2007).

Experiences in district. Rebecca paralleled her experiences growing up and seeing the separation between wealthier students from predominantly white families and marginalized non-dominant groups to her experiences as a special education teacher. Rebecca grasped the complexities which existed within the Rockport district in terms of the flow of money and the intersections of race with socioeconomic status. As she said, "there's the flatland schools and then there's the hill schools and there's just differences there and there's inequities." While Rebecca grew up going to a "hill school" she currently works at a "flatland school" and recognizes the differences and inequities in terms of race, culture and class. She thinks that, "It's important that all kids should be able to have that, and you shouldn't have to pay to get it" and understands that "a lot of it is tied up into like socio-economic status, [which] you can't separate that...totally from race in this country."

Rebecca also showed a willingness to learn more about the communities in which she worked and about the overall context of being a special education teacher in a large, urban district. This coupled with her concerns for equal opportunities and her willingness to read books, "I just read the book " The New Jim Crow" recently" suggest that Rebecca is open to

shifting her perceptions and expectations as she continues to teach. Unfortunately, this could

come at the expense of the students she works if she is not able to quickly learn and adapt.

Intersectionality of Beliefs

Rebecca thinks about intersectionality of race, culture and ability on several levels. First,

Rebecca reflected on her own experiences with disability by highlighting the differences between

invisible and visible disabilities. In this way, Rebecca brought up the issue of the over

representation of African American males in special education, specifically in the category of

emotional disturbance. While she clearly indicated that she does not believe that her own

students were mislabeled, she recognized this as an issue within the field. Rebecca also seemed

to be preoccupied with special education as place-based rather than services and supports. While

she moved from thinking about inclusive education as being something all students with

disabilities could access, she also simultaneously showed some ambivalence towards having a

caseload of students with significant disabilities at her school because of the additional supports

that would need to be present and the fear of their performance being tied to money.

This seems to also play into her overall views about the communities surrounding the

schools, in which she suggests that families are not prioritizing education for her students. She

showed that she also felt she could make a difference in the school, with a "social justice

mission" to save students with disabilities from racially and culturally diverse backgrounds.

Rebecca, however, does think about the intersections of her students disabilities with

their racial and cultural backgrounds. She highlights this in her thinking about the stigma

associated with labels and the deficit perspectives that are often attached to her students with

disabilities from non-dominant backgrounds. She indicated this when she complicated who her

students are and indicating that "sometimes [her] students fall into…stereotypes (in both good

and bad ways) and sometimes [her] students go against these stereotypes (in both good and bad ways)." Rebecca intersects these stereotypes with the student's backgrounds as having a special education label as well as their racial, cultural, and class backgrounds. Therefore, her beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives about the intersections of race, culture and ability are complex, shifting entities.

Beliefs and Retention Decisions

Rebecca believes that all students regardless of ability level are able to see growth and progress in their learning. Rebecca also believes that students with disabilities should have access to the general education curriculum and opportunities to learn among general education peers. While she feels that inclusion opportunities for students with disabilities are important, she also recognized that eliminating special education altogether is more idealistic than feasible and focused heavily on placements for individuals with disabilities.

Rebecca additionally believed that there were external influences that often prevented her students from succeeding in school such as gang violence and drugs, and families that did not prioritize education. She believed that some stereotypes about her students and their backgrounds were accurate, but that some were inaccurate as well. Rebecca also thought about the larger picture the school and community when she spoke about intersections of disability, race, and culture.

One of the areas which Rebecca mentioned, but did not fully explore, is her personal role as an alternatively certified teacher in the Rockport district. Rebecca briefly commented about her ambivalence towards Teach for America and how "[TFA] is doing [her] kids wrong, by putting [her] [t]here." With respect to TFA, Rebecca also pointed out that "there is no longer really a teacher shortage......besides in special ed in [the district]." She recognized the

discrepancy here, because the Rockport district continues to employ TFA candidates while simultaneously firing veteran teachers. At no real point, however, did she recognize her own role, or the role of special education teachers who were able to waive completing a teacher education program, in continuing some of the issues in the education of students from non-dominant backgrounds. She also didn't seem to recognize how being alternatively certified might also perpetuate some of the existing deficit or prejudiced beliefs she held about communities of color within special education and in large, urban schools.   Therefore it may be important for Rebecca to also examine how teacher preparation, specifically being under prepared to teach, may contribute to her overall retention and beliefs related to retention in the future.

Claudia Aguilar

Claudia Aguilar is a 35-year old special education teacher in the district of interest who identifies as a Latina female. Claudia has worked in the district of interest for 10 years as an inclusive support specialist at a middle school. Prior to working in the district of interest, Claudia also worked as a preschool instructor for students with emotional/behavioral disabilities. Claudia got into the field of special education "mostly by accident". She mentioned that after obtaining her Bachelor's degree in a non-education field at a top tier public university, she had outstanding loans and needed to pay them off. Thus, Claudia participated in a loan forgiveness program teaching special education in the local urban school district. This was slightly unique in that she did not participate in TFA or TNTP.   Claudia explained that "there was a stipend given for [working with students with more significant disabilities] within the state" and that's when she decided that she was going to participate. Claudia mentioned how she wanted to "continue studying inclusive education" and lost interest in teaching younger students after her experiences

in preschool. However she remained interested in continuing to work with students with significant disabilities within the district, while obtaining her teaching credential at a local university. Claudia's program provided her with a dual credential in special education and general education. When reflecting on the process, Claudia had nothing but positive things to say about the program, the instructors and the overall process of obtaining her credential in this way. She felt that the university provided a strong foundation in inclusive practices and remarked on the dedicated professors who were, and continue to be, sources of support. From the beginning, the university credentialing program had a philosophy of creating opportunities for inclusion for students with disabilities, and Claudia mentioned that this aligned with her own philosophy of teaching.

Like all of the other participants, Claudia mentioned that it was often challenging to obtain her credential part-time and work full time as a special education teacher. For this reason, she realized that it made sense to "job share." Another person from her cohort, Stacey, felt similarly about the workload, and therefore, Claudia and Stacey decided to become co-teachers in a middle school while obtaining their teaching credentials. Claudia mentioned that "no matter what, first year teachers tend to feel thrown in" to their placements. For Claudia and Stacey, this meant that while their program provided instruction and support that aligned with an inclusive educational philosophy, student teaching opportunities were minimal outside of their current job placement. It also meant that they were not observed in their teaching practice, as they might have been in a more traditional credentialing program. Claudia explained that she "still had student teaching…but it wasn't much."

Beliefs about Disability

Claudia's experiences with disability stemmed from several sources in her life and her experiences. Specifically, growing up Claudia had opportunities to work as a caregiver and be around individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities. She stated that these experiences along with her experiences working as an inclusive support teacher at the middle school, shaped her perceptions of people with disabilities, as well as her own beliefs about disability. Furthermore, like Nick and Stacey, Claudia also believed that her teacher education program and its philosophy of inclusive education gave her opportunities to think differently about special education and opportunities for people with disabilities. Finally, her students themselves shaped her beliefs about disability by constantly pushing her to raise her expectations of what was possible for them.

Background and experiences. Claudia's beliefs, views, and perspectives about disability, therefore, stemmed from her early experiences working with a young girl with Down syndrome as well as an older woman with physical disabilities. When she was "younger...a really good family friend of ours, was this older woman who was actually very disabled, couldn't really do much. … I used to, spend the night at her house and help her out." She indicated that these experiences resulted in her believing that "people with disabilities have been like doing things for themselves but with this woman [she now needed help]." She compared this early experience with her later experience of working with a young woman with Down syndrome, recognizing that there were differences in the way she had initially reacted to the two individuals. "With the little girl with Down Syndrome...it was just taking care of." This led her to think that "someone who might have a mental disability [is different from a person with] a physical disability." More specifically, Claudia believed that the elderly woman could carry on basic

conversations and had capabilities that extended beyond her disability. For the young girl with

Down syndrome, however, Claudia thought of her as a "big, little kid." She would do things for

her and dress her up "like a doll." Claudia reflected on these differences between physical and

intellectual disabilities, but didn't altogether regret the way she acted because it was a product of

the time in which she lived.

Inclusion teacher. Claudia did, however, compare her behavior in past interactions with

the way she might currently interpret the situation, which is to assume that individuals have

abilities beyond societal expectations. Her work as an inclusion teacher resulted in "a lot of

those perceptions [being] changed." She believes that inclusion has also resulted in others seeing

student with disabilities different. She now sees that her students "have the ability."   She

attributes that in part to "there's more expectation ...coming from other people." She stated that

her students are capable of accessing and succeeding in middle school courses with the right

supports in place. Claudia is proud that her work as an inclusive education teacher at the middle

school level because it has allowed students and faculty to recognize that students with moderate

to severe disabilities are still capable of making progress when accessing general education

curriculum. Working to shift the perception of disability is something that she is "happy to see."

Teacher education program. Claudia's own ideas about what is possible for students

with disabilities changed as a result of her university credential program. The program made her

"want to continue doing inclusion." She felt fortunate to have been able to work in an inclusive

middle school program and also touted the strong professors from the university program who all

took a philosophical stance towards the inclusion of individuals with disability.   She said that

the professors "really knew their stuff and … made me wanna continue doing inclusion and the

way they taught." While she appreciated what she learned in the program, she worried that the

single minded focus on inclusion may have made it "hard for students who … have a credential to teach …, doesn't have to be inclusion and [if they] were in [segregated classrooms] might've had a harder time." Despite this worry, she was pleased that the professors felt that students with disability "deserve to have an education on their own level." This philosophy, which stemmed from the credentialing faculty at her teacher education program, led her to also share these ideas and work in her practice towards implementing them.

Students on caseload. The most important influence on Claudia's beliefs, attitudes, and experiences about disability stemmed from her work with her students. During her interviews, Claudia provided multiple examples of how her students would surprise her by exceeding expectations or that her own high expectations for her students would surprise their families and others in the school community. "For example I had a girl student, who … wasn't pushed as much. The family didn't realize that this girl actually had amazing comprehension skills …. They just assumed she didn't know how to do certain things." Claudia indicated that the girl was complicit in her families' beliefs, using "her cuteness and disability so that she didn't have to do anything." However, 7th grade changed everything changed. At this time "she was able to really do work and we were able to see some real comprehension gains." These results changed her parents' and Claudia's perceptions. They "enrolled her in a reading program and [she] advanced so quickly." As a result, both the family of the student and Claudia began to shift expectations as they realized how many gains the student had made in terms of reading comprehension.

Therefore, Claudia's beliefs, attitudes, and experiences about disability were shaped by her experiences prior to entering the field of special education. She connected her experiences of seeing a person with a disability and the way that person was treated and contrast it with her own experiences in her special education program. Claudia stressed opportunities for students with

disabilities to have social/emotional and academic development and to become as independent as possible. When asked about her reaction to seeing a person with a disability in the community, Claudia mentioned that she would wonder about more general things like "where the person might be going" or "if they were visiting friends." Therefore, in contrast to the other participants, Claudia's expressed beliefs and experiences about disability were not completely situated in the school setting.

Beliefs about Race and Culture

Claudia's perspectives about race and culture stemmed from her own experiences as a Latina woman. Her involvement with her students and their families in the school setting and living within the same community as she taught also influenced her beliefs.

Personal background as Latina woman. Claudia shared ideas about race and culture by connecting them to her own background as a Mexican-American woman. She shared how she and some of her peers from Mexican backgrounds were often viewed as unable to speak English based on the assumptions of school professionals.

> I knew many Mexican people who spoke perfect English that were in ESL classes, none of which were college transferable... [They were] very bright and talented and knew the English language... but were...put into classes...just because they spoke another language … They were gonna do that with me as well...and...my dad had to come in and...[say] she speaks English very well, please let her in regular classes....

Claudia's experiences with erroneous perspectives and prejudice led her to act in ways that demonstrated to always assume the competence of her students with disabilities.

Working in the district. Claudia was humble about her ability to be a culturally responsive educator. "I don't think I'm always successful at being culturally responsive."

Instead, she attributes her successes to her team, "who come from different cultures," supporting her in her attempts to reflect her students' cultures. She tries to respond to culture but also knows she has be reflect socioeconomic issues by "just being aware that some folks can't afford certain things."

While Claudia does not feel confident about her ability to implement culturally responsive instruction, she does provide a tool that she uses to think about and understand culture, race, and/or socioeconomic background; her collaboration and consultation with other faculty and staff at her school. When Claudia is unsure about whether her course of action is culturally sensitive to students and their families, she consults with other school staff, many of whom come from a variety of cultural and racial backgrounds, to get feedback on her ideas. While in some ways this could be problematic if Claudia interprets her colleagues backgrounds as somehow representative of a particular group or culture, more than likely, she uses them a tool to bounce off ideas and engage in deeper thinking about her students and their backgrounds as she plans and implements instruction.

Working with families. One of the strongest sources of Claudia's ideas about race and culture stems from her work and collaboration with families of her students. Claudia cited several examples of her experiences working with families and how these experiences shaped her own perspectives about culture, race, and especially about how parents place value on schooling for their children with disabilities. While she explains that she sees some families as not "valuing education," she recognizes that much of this is tied to family members' personal experiences with education and/or navigating the system.

She describes families as often representing "two extreme cases, the first where even though parents didn't do well in school themselves or graduate from college/high school, they

wanted their kids to do well and pushed their kids really hard." She describe how she could

enlist these parents in helping her address problematic behaviors. "The other type of parent, who

might also have not graduated from high school/college, it appears that they don't value

education as much." She says this is particularly true when the "child has pretty severe needs,

this type of parent may have also not seen the point in educating their child." When she talks

with these parents about their children their responses are the she has done something wrong. As

she says, "there was no trust in me or my methods of supporting their kids." However, she is

willing to consider that these parents' responses may be the result of their previous experiences,

and that they "might've been taken out on [her]." She believes that these two extremes

characterize the effect of culture on behavior.

Claudia also acknowledges that families may have difficulty with affording school

supplies and opportunities for their children. She said that "some parents can't afford

stuff...can't...come to IEP meetings easily, can't afford to give me $3 for a party that they earned.

...can't always go to Special Olympics stuff cuz they don't have transportation." She responds to

these situations by trying to "help out those parents as much as possible." Therefore, Claudia

supports families through multiple means in order to provide access to education and education

related experiences in a variety of ways.

Students on caseload. Finally, Claudia's interactions with students and families from

diverse cultural backgrounds also informed her own perspectives about race and culture. She

was cognizant of her own background as a Mexican-American and used her knowledge of

Spanish to support students and their families in accessing opportunities. One of her students,

whose family spoke only Spanish, was unable to gain access to enrichment opportunities such as

Special Olympics because previous teachers were not Spanish speakers. She said "there's all

these things that are going on, they can't help them with his homework." So she offered to help with his homework if his parents would "take him to baseball and Special Olympics." Doing this freed them up and now "they are there all the time, they go to every game, they go." She talked about how this changed the parents beliefs about their son, when [the] mom came to the IEP, she was like, "I didn't know...he would like to do that I always thought he was shy." Not only were the parents pleased, they were now willing to be less "sheltering," even allowing "him go on the overnight camp."

Up until the student entered her Claudia's class, communication was be mostly through translators. Once in her class, she used her knowledge of Spanish to help support the student's enrichment, and also helped them in terms of providing language assistance, which, in turn, also supported the student academically. Claudia has used her intimate knowledge and experiences of seeing how English Language programs in the public schools operate, as well as the knowledge of families and school staff, to support student success.

Intersectionality of Beliefs

Claudia shared many instances in which her views about disability, race, and culture intersected through her experiences with schooling, as well as her students' backgrounds and experiences. Primarily, Claudia herself was misidentified as an English language learner. She learned early on that assumptions can be made about individuals from non-dominant backgrounds in terms of ability. In her own teaching, therefore, Claudia aims to be sensitive to making assumptions about her students and their families. Claudia recognizes the intersection of disability, race, and culture through the segregation of communities of color and the cultural capital some families have in terms of obtaining placement in her program. Specifically, Claudia discussed how she recognized that "people with disabilities are still segregated" and that "often

times these decisions are made by a team that doesn't always have the best interest of the child."

Therefore, Claudia highlights that there is segregation in special education, particularly for students of color. She recognizes this as an issue in the field and in the Rockport district. For her students with disabilities, Claudia makes efforts to learn about their backgrounds and build relationships with their families.

Claudia is also attuned to how segregation works at the community level and works to mitigate some of the socioeconomic differences she sees by providing student supports beyond the hours of school. She gave an example of how she supported a student who was unable to clean his clothes for gym class by bringing him an extra set that stayed at school and got washed in the school's washer/dryer. She lives in the same community as she teaches, among the neighborhood school community. This experience provides her with an insider perspective and context through which she views her students and their livelihoods.

Beliefs and Retention Decisions

During our last interview, Claudia shared that she would remain in the same school and placement in the next school year. Of all participants, Claudia seemed the most committed to remaining in her class. Claudia's beliefs about seeing her students access instruction and succeed in inclusive environments, coupled with her own investment in the school community was one of the things that fueled her desire to continue to teach in the Rockport district as a special education teacher.

Claudia had beliefs and ideas that intersected along disability, race, and culture at several levels. Her beliefs about these intersections were formed through her own experiences in education. Being presumed incompetent in her own high school, Claudia understood firsthand the importance of moving beyond assumptions of what a person can or cannot do. She embodied

this in her work with middle school students in the inclusive special education program. Specifically, Claudia worked to provide meaningful instruction to her students with disabilities and support them both at school and outside of school. She encouraged her students to participate in enrichment programs and build confidence in social settings while simultaneously pushing them to excel academically in general education classes. Her own strong beliefs about the abilities and strengths of her students fuels her to continue to teach special education in an urban district.

Chapter 5: Cross Case Analysis

This chapter presents the findings of the cross case analysis about why special education teachers choose whether to continue teaching in an urban school district. Specifically it will (1) examine factors, which were common across all participants, in deciding whether to remain in the field/district; (2) look at comparative and contrasting beliefs, ideas, perspectives, and philosophies about disability, race, and culture across participants; and (3) provide comparisons among participants as to how their intersectional beliefs about disability, race, and culture informed their overall retention decisions.

Factors Influencing Decisions to Remain in the District as a Special Education Teacher

A number of factors went into special education teacher participants' overall decisions about whether to continue teaching special education in the Rockport district. Findings from this study suggested that there were three critical things that all participants articulated as impacting retention/attrition decisions: (1) financial issues, (2) family obligations, and (3) students.

Financial Issues

All participants mentioned that one of the main influences on their decisions to teach special education in Rockport had to do with financial issues. While money was also tied into other important factors such as family size and cost of living, it was important to all participants that they were adequately paid for their time and work, had enough money to complete licensure requirements, and had money needed to meet living expenses.

Adequate pay. All participants mentioned feeling stressed or unsatisfied with their overall salaries. Nick, Stacey, and Althea, who left the Rockport district at the conclusion of the 2013-2014 school year, stated that they moved into positions that provided them with better

salaries that were commensurate with their overall work. While Stacey continued to work in an urban school district as a special education teacher, she mentioned that her overall "salary is higher" in her new district and that "special education teachers get a better salary and benefits for their time."

Certification costs. Additionally, as in many large public school districts around the United States, the Rockport school district operates on a salary scale that is determined by a combination of years of teaching experience, certification level, professional development units, and level of education (Hanushek, 2007). Special education teacher participants in this study indicated that moving up the pay scale by completing additional educational credits or by completing additional certification courses did not take into account the high cost of these programs. For example, when Althea spoke about the process of taking courses while simultaneously working as a full-time teacher, she mentioned "debt…debt...fucking debt." Althea attended a small, private, religious institution to obtain her initial teaching credential which ended up creating a situation in which she needed to take out money to sustain her expenses. The process of going through the credential program left her with a great deal of student loan debt, particularly since the program took her more than three years to complete at part-time status.   Althea connects her debt to her current teaching position and her overall salary as a teacher citing that it is "not enough to convince [her] to get in that debt again."

Claudia also mentioned having to tutor students while she was completing part of her credential program because of "university loans." The program that she worked with helped her to "pay off some of [her] loans." Thus, Claudia also felt it was important not to have "too much student loan debt" and was able to work it out so that she could cancel some of that debt.

Other participants also felt that costs of credential programs were burdensome and caused additional stress and financial issues for them as they worked as special education teachers. Stacey mentioned that she had even begun to get through all her Master's coursework but felt that she "needed a break" and that the "expenses were too high" to continue. Particularly for Nick and Althea, however, who were earning credentials while they were teaching in classrooms, both mentioned that it was difficult having to pay for their course work while simultaneously teaching in the district. Nick mentioned that it was "challenging" to find time to work on his credential while teaching and that there was also stress associated with "paying for school."

Other than Rebecca, who mentioned that her credential was obtained directly through a set of assignments she completed through the Rockport district, all other participants had financial issues attached to obtaining their teaching credentials and/or increasing education level. Therefore, the problem is multifaceted because, for these participants, issues related to financing university programs hindered or prevented many of the participants from obtaining a higher level of education, and also impacted their abilities to move up the pay scale. These issues impacted their overall decisions about whether to remain in the district. For Rebecca, she didn't have to "pay for [her] credential," while other participants felt burdened by the cost of their programs and the overall stress of going through a credential as it related to time and salary increases.

Living expenses. Furthermore, participants also indicated stress as related to living in an expensive city. For example, during his last interview, I asked Nick to provide suggestions for what he thought would make staying in the field/district more likely. He said, "my knee jerk response…it's a terrible response, but…more money…it's one thing for sure I mean…" Although he knew that was a controversial response, he believed that living in the city in which he lived resulted in financial challenges. He said that while he had "a lot of conversations with

teachers which are 'oh I wish I had...more support for the students….," he indicated that he also had "a lot of conversations where teachers will say 'I can't afford to leave my apartment' and 'I have a kid' and 'we're in a one bedroom in downtown.'" He attributes greater teach stress to inadequate pay in a city the he imagined was "within the top 5 most expensive areas to live."

Nick's thoughts about money illustrate both the importance of money to support and retain special education teachers in a large, urban district like Rockport, but also speak to the overall cost of living in a large, metropolitan city. Nick correctly suggests that the city in which Rockport district resides is one of the most expensive cities in the country. For him personally, Nick shared in his journal entry that "it would be very difficult living in the…area on his [Rockport] income alone." Additionally, Nick observed that many teachers in the Rockport district felt stressed because low salaries impacted their livelihoods in the expensive city. This point is particularly poignant for the Rockport area due to gentrification and rising costs of housing in many of the traditionally urban neighborhoods.

Althea also discussed moving her family out of the city because of the growing costs of living in a large metropolitan area. When Althea decided that she would leave the district to work in an afterschool program further north, she mentioned that one of the additional benefits of the position was low "cost of living" for her and "[her] family." Althea was the only participant who also mentioned gentrification and how the city was becoming more expensive and "lots of folks" were "leaving." Rebecca also mentioned that it was "expensive to live in [the city]" and that her salary as a teacher meant that she had to "live with roommates" as a young professional, rather than being able to afford her own place. Thus, participants also felt the strain of rising housing and overall living costs associated with working and living near the Rockport district.

Family Obligations

Four of the five participants in this study had families and children that influenced their overall decisions about whether they were to remain within the Rockport district and/or field of special education. For example one of the most important factors influencing Nick's decision to leave the Rockport district was the fact that his wife was about to have their first child. Nick's wife had family far away from the city in which they worked and they made the joint decision to be closer to family after the birth of their son. He acknowledged, "that's not to say... that...if we were not having a kid, that we wouldn't someday consider a move back there...but having a kid… that's where we wanna buy a house...and...to raise a child... for them to go to school." Nick explained, the area around Rockport was not that kind of place where they wanted to live. Additionally, Nick placed a strong value on living near family while he and his wife raise their own kids. For Nick, this was an integral part of the decision to leave Rockport.

Similarly, for Stacey, moving out of Rockport was partially due to moving into another city with her fiancé. Stacey said that she and her fiancé wanted to start a family and, because they lived in another city, it was easier for her to find a job closer to her new home. "My ... fiancé was encouraging me to move and live closer to work and closer to where we live." Additionally, Stacey explained that, for her, living where she worked was an integral part teaching. Like Nick, Stacey was interested in starting a family and believed that it was important to work closer to the place where she wanted to raise her family. Both Nick and Stacey indicated that they wanted to raise a family in a place outside of the Rockport area and both moved out of the district as well as out of the city.

Althea also shared that she was interested in finding a new position because of her "growing family." Althea recalled that when she started teaching in Rockport, she was single.

As time went on, however, she got married and had two children. She explained that as this happened, the salary that was offered by her position as a special education teacher and by working in Rockport was not enough for her family. She said, "it's not fittin' the bills anymore, even though I love it." While she explained that she was still committed to the field, her family needs required her to finds a better paying position such as a "supervisor position or coordinator position." Like Nick and Stacey, Althea shared the importance of finding a position that supported her family situation.

Claudia was also in a similar situation as Althea. However, Claudia's concerns related to how her job affects her family as it relates to time. When Claudia started teaching in the Rockport district over 8 years ago, she was a single woman with no additional family commitments. Overtime, Claudia recalled that it became more challenging to balance "time with her family" and the challenge of being an effective special education teacher.

Culture of teaching and families. Among all of the participants, Claudia is the one who thought most deeply about how family obligations tie into the overall teaching culture. She talked about how teaching has become mostly "young maybe new teachers without families or commitments like children." She also worried that these teachers "set a precedent...and you know hiring from like Teach for America" because "these are younger people without families … and … that's not feasible for people with families and." She talked about how her time in consumed with meetings but she was still expected to "get your IEPs in on time." She said, "I'm like really...you gave me 9 [triennial reports] and you're telling me I have to get all my IEPs done on time!...That's not feasible with a family." Furthermore, she said that creating modifications was so time consuming that she even had to have her "program specialist … come in and help

me out because I never had a break...and I still don't have a lunch break." And, as she said, this is not a precedent she wants to set!

Claudia illustrates a major issue in the field which is twofold. First, she explains how there is an expectation within the overall teacher culture that circulates around the schedule of a single, young person. This is also supported by Nick, who mentioned in his journal entry that if he were "single" he would "find a way to make the budget work with the [Rockport] salary schedule." This overall culture, therefore, makes it difficult for those with families to balance their family lives with their work. Claudia indicated that she wants to move beyond this traditional conception of special education teachers as people who don't take breaks and are solely committed to the job. This is part of the reason that Claudia decided to stay within the district and within special education. She wanted to challenge the overall teacher culture by fighting against these traditional conceptions. She loves her job, but also loves her family and believes that it is important to be able to find balance and that the Rockport district should support and accommodate special education teachers with families.

As described above, family obligations and values related to families were integral components of the overall decision participants made about whether to remain in the urban district as special education teachers. Nick, Stacey, and Althea all included family obligations as part of their overall decision to leave the Rockport district and, in Althea's case, the field of special education. By contrast, Claudia used her family obligations as a tool for attempting to shift expectations and the overall teacher culture of having families while working as a special education teacher in Rockport. Thus she stayed within Rockport as a special education teacher and worked with program specialists and the teacher union to shift expectations of special education teachers. Rebecca also wanted to create a life balance as she got further into her

special education teaching career. Although she initially fell into the description that Claudia

made of young, single special education teachers from Teach from America, Rebecca created a

work-life balance which allowed her to persist within Rockport as a special education teacher.

Students

Another major factor influencing special education teacher participants overall retention

decision was their students. The need to work with and support their students was perhaps the

most important of all of the factors influencing special education teacher retention. In some

ways, large caseloads contributed to the stress of accommodating a variety of needs with little

support or resources. More often, however, love of students and passion for seeing their overall

growth outweighed this piece. This can be seen in the retention decisions of all the special

education teacher participants. Indeed, even participants who decided to leave the district

continued to work with students within the educational system. None of the participants left

education, which reflected their strong commitment to working with students to make progress

towards goals and a strong commitment to an overall career in the field of education.

Student progress. Althea indicated that one of her favorite parts of her position as a

special education teacher in Rockport was being able to see the progress her students made in

meeting their academic and social/emotional goals. She said that this progress is easier to detect

as a special educator because these teachers tend to have students for several years in a row.

> This allows for more continuity of the instruction I provide to them individually. I know
>
> their strengths and weaknesses as well as what motivates them to succeed. A rapport is
>
> already established which helps me to extract and increase more information within each
>
> student so they may perform to the best of their ability.

She was particularly pleased because this extended time allowed her to watch "the students develop and grow in their writing and academic content."

While Althea decided not to remain in the district, she decided to stay in education saying that she was motived by being able to support growth and progress in students.   Because Althea was not happy about the constricting structure of the traditional school day, she moved to work as an after school coordinator supporting students outside of the school day.

Individualized supports. Stacey also felt strongly about her relationships with her students with disabilities and indicated that one of the biggest benefits for her, with respect to the field of special education, was "while working with students with disabilities is that I get time to be creative with the curriculum and work towards IEP goals vs. state mandated curriculum." Stacey also like the "smaller class sizes, more 1 to 1 attention for each student…and peer tutors that support my students."

Stacey also enjoyed the opportunity to be able to provide individualized supports for her students. She spoke at length about how being able to support her students in their overall academic and social development was one of the cornerstones of her continued persistence in the field. She set up several peer tutoring programs for her students, which allowed them to access general education peers in unstructured settings and develop relationships and social opportunities. She also facilitated transition planning opportunities for the students through supporting them in leading their own IEPs and providing them with meaningful vocational opportunities in the community. Stacey invested a lot of time in her students both in the traditional and non-traditional school setting.

Nick also felt strongly about supporting his students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Nick believed that having access to appropriate supports and helping students with disabilities

succeed in inclusive settings was critical to his persistence in the field. He finds the work

gratifying, "one cool thing that has happened the last couple years is that our team finds students

in the neighborhood that qualify for full inclusion so we're getting more and more students that

are from the blocks around [the school]… it's really cool."

Nick's overall decision to remain in the field of special education, despite having left the

Rockport district, came from his overall love for working to provide students with disabilities

with access to general education settings. Specifically he highlighted the importance of seeing a

student "live the life that they would live with or without a learning difference." While he

acknowledged that the process was not completed, he remained optimistic about the potential to

be a part of the process of providing supports and services to students with disabilities, especially

in their neighborhood schools.

Connections with students and their families. Claudia continued to work in the

Rockport district and in special education because she felt strongly about her students and their

potential. In fact, she specifically stated that she was in the field of special education for her

students. She believes that "some of my kids are really successful, when the parents really... buy

into the system and trust...my methods." As a result, she built in communication with families in

order to further support her students in becoming engaged citizens. She explains that this is what

really matters to her when it comes to being a teacher and through her successes, she "get[s] to

contribute to... the world in some ways" by creating future "successful citizens of the

world…[who are] gonna be contributing to the world."

Students and school community. Finally**,** Rebecca also continued to work in special

education because she loved learning about the field of special education and "interacting with

students," and she "LOVE[s] all the students that I've been able to work with." Rebecca also

mentioned how she enjoyed "the types of people who work in special ed" and working with other individuals in the field. She "generally get[s] along with very well," having good relationships with her overall school community, in addition to her students, and that made her feel good about continuing to work there.

She finds the joy she gets out of teaching special education especially interesting because she "didn't really plan on being here." As mentioned in Chapter 4, Rebecca did not plan on being a special education teacher. However, Teach for America placed her in the Rockport district as a high school special education teacher. Her fulfillment resulted in her staying well beyond the traditional Teach for America program two-year commitment. Her strong commitment to her students enabled her to persist in the field and in the district.

As described above, all special education teacher participants articulated strong commitments to their students. Even participants who decided to leave the field and/or urban district decided to continue working in education. Much of the decision to continue working in the broader field came from their interactions, support of, and overall belief in their students. All participants described working with their students and seeing student growth as an overall rewarding experience. Additionally, all participants connected their initial interests in the field of special education and benefits of working the field directly to their students.

Summary

Several factors influenced the overall retention decisions of special education teacher participants. Most commonly, these factors included salary, family obligations, and working with students. All participants mentioned each of these factors as critical to their overall decisions about whether to remain in the urban district as a special education teacher.

In terms of salary, all participants spoke about being overworked and underpaid within the Rockport district for the amount of time and effort they put into their positions as special education teachers. While Nick and Rebecca spoke about salary at large as an issue in teaching, Stacey and Althea directly connected money with their personal situations and decisions to leave the district for better paying positions. Claudia, on the other hand, planned to work with the union to fight low wages in the district. She emphasized how special education teachers should be receiving overtime pay for all the times they cannot get time to use the bathroom, eat lunch, or take a break during work. All participants felt the strain, within the district and within the field of special education at large, of not being provided compensation that is commensurate with the work that they were doing.

Family obligations were also tied into salary issues for the majority of participants. With the exception of Rebecca, all participants had partners and, for some, children who they were trying to support financially. Stacey spoke about the prospect of starting a family and how working closer to home would be beneficial both financially and in terms of having children. Claudia and Althea both had young children and consistently worked to find a balance between spending time with family and their positions as special education teachers. Claudia stayed in the district, in part, because she believed in changing the overall culture of teaching. Claudia suggested that in addition to the normally discussed influences of Teach for America in urban school districts, they also seem to shift the expectations of who teachers in urban districts should be: young, unmarried, and willing to dedicate all their time only to their jobs.

In some ways, Rebecca's early teaching career seemed to fall into this category. As a Teach for America cohort member, Rebecca embodied the young, single, teacher that many cohort members are. As she continued to teach, however, Rebecca realized the importance of

life balance. Especially during the latter part of data collection, Rebecca seemed more intent on finding ways to balance her life and job. In some sense, all of the teacher participants of the study started out as young people without family obligations. As they progressed in their careers, however, they all began to realize that family obligations were not altogether conducive to their positions as special education teacher in an urban district.

Despite their changing beliefs about their jobs, all participants were dedicated to the students with disabilities with whom they worked and supported in the urban district. This love of their students and overall investment in their growth and success sometimes kept them from leaving sooner than some of them did.   In a sense, all special education teacher participants, stayed beyond the traditional critical period in which many teachers tend to leave: three years (Billingsley, 2007). Much of the reason for staying within the field and district for as long as they did was the students. Despite challenging behaviors and feelings of frustration with families, all special education participants spoke positively about the relationships they built with their students. All participants expressed strong, positive beliefs about their students and their potential for success. Indeed, it was the students that kept them going from day to day.

Special Education Teacher Beliefs about Disability, Race, and Culture

As mentioned in Chapter 4, all special education teacher participants expressed beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, and philosophies regarding disability and/or race and culture. Beliefs about disability, race, and culture were not static, and some ideas changed over the course of data collection. Overall, however, beliefs about disability, race, and culture tended to fall across a spectrum. This section discusses beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives about disability, race, and culture as they relate to cross case comparative beliefs. It will then illustrate how participant

beliefs about disability, race, and culture intersected and participants' overall retention in special education and/or the urban district.

Cross Case Beliefs about Disability

As mentioned in Chapter 4, special education teacher participants had beliefs, perspectives, and ideas about disability that were predominantly shaped through the lens of the special education system and school context. While Claudia, Althea and, to some extent, Stacey all had experiences interacting with individuals with disabilities outside of their teaching, Rebecca and Nick had limited experiences with individuals with disabilities outside of their classroom context. In sharing these key sources of beliefs, it was apparent that participant's beliefs about disability fell across a spectrum. At different points in data collection, most participants seemed to take a medicalized approach to disability. In other words, some participants mentioned the need for the continued system of special education, and the importance of labels and placements based on labels, in providing services for students with disabilities. At other points, however, participants seemed to talk about disability in terms of inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities. Still further, participants connected their beliefs and ideas about disability with their students, personal experiences, and their experiences teaching. Finally, a subset of participants also included information that highlighted emancipatory frameworks with respect to disability; mainly, beliefs and ideas that provided students disabilities with opportunities for self-determination. Therefore, this section discusses the cross case beliefs, and perspectives of special education teachers with respect to disability. Specifically it discusses participants' medicalized approaches toward disability, inclusive philosophies about disability, student-centered beliefs, and emancipatory frameworks of disability.

Medicalized approach toward disability. At some point during data collection, most participants articulated a medicalized view of disability. During interviews and in responses to journal prompts, Althea, for example, referred to identification of students with disabilities based on testing, and the overall functioning of students. Although Althea expressed great support for her students and their overall growth, she also believed that her students with disabilities belonged in segregated academic placements based on their overall academic performance, as measured by "psychological assessments" and as identified by their disability labels.

Overall, Althea's beliefs and attitudes about disability highlight a caretaker approach to her students with disabilities; she believed in caring *for* individuals with disabilities. The students with whom Althea worked initially, who were classified as having significant disabilities, shaped her overall view of disability. Therefore, even with her students with mild disabilities, such as learning disability and emotional/behavioral disturbance, Althea believes they should remain within a segregated setting for academic work because of their level of performance. Althea tended to question who within her classroom should receive a particular label or service for special education, but was more reluctant to say that students did not need services or that labels stigmatized students with disabilities.

Similarly, Rebecca, also seemed to agree with the overall system of special education for her students. While Rebecca did see how students with judgmental disabilities, such as learning disabilities, could be misidentified for special education, she believed that overall the system was correct in identifying her own students with disabilities. She did not really question how her students were labeled, nor did she see the possibility that they could have been mislabeled. Rebecca mentioned that she's only ever worked with "3 or 4 emotionally disturbed children...over the last 5 years" and she felt "like [they had] been appropriately labeled as such."

Additionally, when asked about labels for students with disabilities, Rebecca responded that "there shouldn't be labels…as long as a continuum of services and options is available for students" and how one could "call the [segregated class] whatever you wanted" and the "special education teacher would be called interventionist." Rebecca's thoughts about having a program for students with significant disabilities suggested that, like Althea, she thought of special education as a *place*, rather than a set of services and supports for students with disabilities. Her comment indicated that she thought of placement for students with disabilities as structured through disability labels or categorization. Overall she seemed to believe in the structure of the special education system for categorizing students with disabilities according to disability needs.

As mentioned in chapter 4, Stacey's initial exposure to individuals with disabilities came through a clinical appointment at a center for applied behavior analysis. Her initial exposure to beliefs about disabilities, therefore, came from a medicalized framework in which individuals with challenging behaviors were given supports to alleviate these behaviors or mitigate symptoms associated with their autism. By contrast, during the time of data collection, she worked in a fully inclusive school setting with students with low-incidence disabilities, where the goal was to improve the environment so that individuals with disabilities achieve academic and social/emotional success. These contrasting experiences both informed her beliefs about disabilities. Stacey's beliefs and perspectives, similar to some of those articulated by Nick, Althea, and Rebecca, suggest that inclusion "unfortunately…is not for everybody." Stacey's medicalized beliefs and attitudes suggest that there need to be "special or smaller classes" for students in "certain subjects" when they don't "thrive in inclusion." Her description of inclusion, therefore, makes it sound like a place, rather than supports or services provided to

individuals with disabilities. In some ways, this place based description mirrors one provided by Rebecca and Althea, when she talks about students with significant disabilities.

Claudia also had some ideas which fell in line with a medicalized view of disability. Like Althea, Claudia also had experiences in a caregiver role for individuals with disabilities which occurred outside of her special education teaching experiences. Claudia's initial experiences with a person with a disability led her to believe that it was her role to do things *for* individuals with intellectual disabilities. When she described the little girl with a disability, who she later met, she highlighted how people, including herself, around the girl would "dress her up" and make her look "like a doll."

Claudia also mentioned how she did not regret these early experiences and beliefs, because they shaped who she is today. From time to time, Claudia incorporated language indicative of medicalized beliefs about disability. For example, she would describe some of her students as "low functioning" or "high functioning." Indeed, language related to functionality falls directly in line with the medical model view of disability (Shakespeare, 2006).

Nick also mentioned, initially that he believed that the system of special education, as it exists in public schools today, is set up to support "individual learning profiles by placing students with disabilities into particular programs." Like Rebecca, Nick indicated that he thought about special education as a place where students with disabilities were sorted by "learning profiles." Nick also mentioned that he believed that the system of labeling students with disabilities had benefits, by providing services and supports that were tailored to characteristics within those disabilities, at least initially.

Therefore, all participants shared language and ideas about the field of special education and disability that fell in line with a medicalized lens of disability. While Althea was most open

with her expressed beliefs about students with disabilities having academic supports and services in segregated settings, and the role of traditional assessments in appropriately identifying students, Rebecca too subscribed to the traditional view of special education in identifying her students and special education placement. Even Claudia, Nick and Stacey, at one point or another, grouped individuals with a particular label when speaking about disability and described the level of overall functioning of a student with a particular label. This language around disability tends to fall directly in line with the dominant discourse within the special education system (Artiles, 2011; Shakespeare, 2006). Although all participants went through credentialing programs which provided them with definitions of special education and disability, the majority tended to talk about inclusion and other types of school settings for individuals with disabilities as synonymous with special education. This idea of special education as a place aligns with the dominant discourse of the public school systems (Artiles, 2011).

Inclusive framework of disability.   Some of what participants described, in terms of their beliefs and perspectives about disability, however, also fell in line with more inclusive views of disability. Nick expressed a philosophy about inclusivity for students with disabilities in general education settings. He spoke about how his program had "upped the percentage of students who would benefit from services and strategies provided in the inclusion program" and wondered about how this could be done on a "district level" so that there's no longer "a class for autism or a class for this disability type at a particular school." He points to how this could be important "because currently students are being bused from everywhere…for that one autism program, etc." Therefore, Nick typically highlighted his own beliefs and attitudes about disability and services for students with disabilities through discussions about the overall philosophy of inclusion or contexts in which to best support students with disabilities.   In an

ideal world, Nick believed that students with disabilities could be supported in general education

settings and receive services provided by a team of educators within this setting. He believed

that students should all be able to attend their neighborhood schools where services for support

could be provided. Nick worked to make this a reality at his elementary school in Rockport,

saying that each year more and more students from the neighborhood surrounding his school

were able to attend.

Rebecca also saw the importance of special education as a means of serving individuals

with disabilities in the school system, and understood how disability labels could carry forward

negative stereotypes and consequences. In her journal reflection and interviews, Rebecca

discussed how she believed in providing students with disabilities opportunities to access

inclusive environments. She spoke about how she saw other schools using "inclusive models"

and "having great success." While she seemed reluctant to fully embrace inclusion because of

the "lack of basic skills" being taught for students to succeed, she saw inclusion as best practice

for students with disabilities overall.

Althea also discussed inclusive opportunities for her students with disabilities through her

journal reflections and interview responses. Like Nick, she believed that students with

disabilities should have the option to attend their neighborhood school. She spoke about how

"general ed students have the option of going to another school if they don't like that school" but

"special education [is] limited in this way." Here she explains that not all schools provide the

services and supports that students need within their neighborhood schools and how having

options available at local schools would be "important for students with disabilities." Althea

also spoke about how she wanted her students to experience social inclusion. She mentioned

how she ensured that her students were "included in all school assemblies and field trips" with

general education peers. While Althea never talked about academic inclusion for her students, she still saw inclusion as important for social and emotional development of people with disabilities.

Stacey also advocated for inclusion for her students with disabilities, citing social/emotional and academic benefits. She provided examples of working with general education teachers to support acceptance for her students within the context of the general education classroom. She also detailed the story of her students' high school graduation where they were supported by "general education peers as they walked across the stage." Stacey hoped that the same peer group "translates to the rest of their lives."

Additionally, Claudia also saw the importance of inclusion for students with disabilities by holding high expectations. While Claudia initially believed that it was her role to do things *for* individuals with intellectual disabilities, she quickly learned that she could actually support her students with disabilities in succeeding and making gains on their own. Currently, therefore, Claudia believes that all students are able to make progress towards their educational goals and should have opportunities to be included in general education settings. Her experiences both in her teacher education program and in schools solidified her stance about providing inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities. While Claudia explained that inclusion did not necessarily benefit every student, she believes that it is important to give students access to inclusive environments before assuming that they will not thrive.

In sum, all participants also had beliefs about including individuals with disabilities in general education settings. Nick connected his philosophy to an overall strong push to provide supports and services to individuals with disabilities within a general setting. Both Nick and Althea also wanted students with disabilities to have access to neighborhood schools, where

services could be provided within the local context. Althea believed in social inclusion of students with disabilities, such that they have opportunities to interact with general education peers and develop social/emotionally. Rebecca believes in inclusion being best practice and a successful model in schools. While she did not seem to view it as an opportunity which all students with disabilities should have access to, she did feel that it was important for own students with high incidence disabilities. Stacey and Claudia both started out having more medicalized views of disabilities and moved into more inclusive beliefs as they entered their teacher education program and began teaching in an inclusive environment. Both worked closely with general education peers and teachers to provide students with disabilities with academic and social/emotional opportunities for inclusion. Therefore, each participant had varying levels of investment in inclusive opportunities for individuals with disabilities, especially within in the school context.

Student-centered beliefs about disability. All special education teacher participants had student-centered perspectives about disability. Specifically, all participants connected their beliefs about disability directly towards their own classrooms, students, and overall school context. At different points during data collection, all participants shared anecdotes or examples that stemmed directly from their own experiences working as special education teachers. These experiences connected with their overall beliefs about disability, given their work with students in daily practice.

Claudia provided a set of examples working with her students with disabilities which surprised her as well as the other teachers in her school. These examples highlighted the high expectations she built for her students and underscored her beliefs about the capabilities of people with disabilities. For example, she mentioned how she had "a student whose parents

wanted him in an autism class/program" and how "it was really an issue of access to individualized materials" and how once he came into her "program…he caught up" and was on grade level with his math work. Claudia's high expectations for her students was conveyed through her student-centered descriptions and examples.

Similarly, Stacey too connected her overall views about disability to the students with whom she was working in schools. She described how having students with and without disabilities support each other can be pivotal to building inclusive environments where students with all learning profiles can be respected.

Stacey identified a situation where one of the students on her caseload who had autism was able to garner the support of non-disabled peers when he was having a difficult time. As she described it, "There have been times when the whole class has stopped their work to help a student who was struggling with some anxiety over a change in his routine by doing some yoga breathing exercises." Stacey facilitated this situation by approaching the class directly and giving the students suggestions about how to support one of their classmates, for example, "remaining calm and help."

Nick also facilitated inclusive opportunities for his students through "peer groups" and "lunch club," as well as "ability awareness sessions" where he "present[ed] the idea that everybody has things that are challenging, everybody has things that they're good at... [and to] pair up and become a stronger group, by...helping people with the things we're good at and asking for help when something's challenging." These opportunities provided students with access to social and emotional supports within general education and an opportunity for students to gain visibility within the school setting. Students, therefore, are able to be together in more informal social settings as well as the academic setting.

Althea's student-centered practices focused largely on providing a classroom culture that promoted success. Althea described how she wanted her students to "try their best" and how to "shake it off when something doesn't go their way" and teaches her students how to develop "social and emotional skills." She also explains that her students "get along very well with general ed peers." Althea encourages her students to be involved with students in general education classes and develop relationships with the students. She also focuses on how to strengthen her students' social and emotional development by providing them with coping skills and encouragement.

Rebecca's student centered ideas also included high expectations for her students with high incidence disabilities. Her journal entries suggested that she embraced student differences and viewed her students as "capable of achieving success." Rebecca believed in her students' abilities to make progress with their individual goals. Her school also had a college preparatory model, and Rebecca supported that vision for her students with disabilities, many of whom went on to "technical or community schools" after graduation.

Emancipatory. Finally, a subset of participants had beliefs and perspectives that moved beyond student-centered views, and would fall into philosophies that allowed students with disabilities from non-dominant backgrounds to take ownership of their own lives as well as embrace their backgrounds. These individuals included Claudia, Nick, and Stacey. All three participants were invested in having their students with disabilities lead their own IEPs. This practice ensured that the students had opportunities for self-determination and individual goal setting. Additionally, Claudia and Stacey both remarked that when they used to work together as co-teachers, they would have students on their caseload provide school tours to visiting families.

This was another way for her students to gain visibility and also interact directly with incoming peers and families and assume leadership roles within the school.

Overall, special education teacher participants' beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, and philosophies about disability were not static. Special education teacher participants all had times where fell in line with the dominant discourse in special education and the medicalization of disability. Because all participants had worked in the Rockport district for several years, it was difficult for them to move outside of the framework completely. Many still described students in using labels, citing functionality, and using the system based on special education as a place versus a set of services and supports for students identified with disabilities.

At times, however, some special education teacher participants thought more carefully about their overarching perspectives about disability. These beliefs and ideas usually supported an inclusive framework for disability. Participants wanted some form of inclusion for their students with disabilities and worked to provide opportunities for their students both within and outside of school. For Rebecca and Althea, both were more interested in maintaining a continuum of placements for students with disabilities. Stacey tried, whenever possible, to facilitate inclusive opportunities for her students but felt that not all students could "thrive" being in general education settings. Claudia and Nick felt most strongly about the benefits of inclusive education to their students with disabilities, their peers, and the larger community.

Furthermore, participants articulated some level of student-centered views about disability. Participants typically derived examples of their perspectives and experiences with disability directly from teaching and from their own students. Althea described how she encouraged her students to be successful in their class and how they could learn coping skills to deal with frustration. Stacey shared how she supported her general education students in taking

ownership over a peer with autism. Claudia explained how she helped change perceptions of her female student with a disability by pushing her to work harder in her reading program. Nick, Claudia, and Stacey also took it one step further and described how they provided their students with opportunities to determine their own futures through leading their own IEPs. Thus, beliefs, attitudes, perspectives and philosophies of disability fall across a spectrum and each of the participants had moments when their own views about disability fell across this spectrum as well.

Cross Case Beliefs about Race and Culture

Similar to beliefs and views about disability, participants overall thoughts about race and culture also fell across a continuum. Overall, participants' beliefs about race and culture ranged from (a) deficit views of students and/or staff of color, (b) student-centered beliefs, and (c) critically conscious perspectives. Without directly asking participants, all shared their ideas about race and culture in direct relation to the students they worked with and/or their own experiences with race and culture.

Deficit views of students/staff of color. Some participants, at a point during their interviews and journal entries, provided information about beliefs that were deficit-based, particularly for communities of color. At times, these beliefs were tied into the families of the students they taught who were from racially, culturally and sometimes socioeconomically, non-dominant backgrounds and acting in a role of savior for disenfranchised students with disabilities within the urban context. At other times, they were tied to issues of negative behaviors on the part of students and or generalizations about particular racial and cultural groups.

Rebecca articulated a deficit perspective towards students/families when she generalized how "one of the reasons that [she] originally got into education and chose to do this was because

[she] was given such great educational opportunities" and she "thought that it was important that all kids should be able to have that." Here Rebecca illustrates a "savior" attitude towards education and specifically towards working with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. She places her own educational experiences as having attended private schools and having gone through college as qualifiers for working within the Rockport district as a special education teacher. In some way, she believes that she can be charged to save her students with disabilities from non-dominant backgrounds by providing them with educational opportunities.

Like Rebecca, Nick also talked about "serving a high need" area when choosing to work in special education and in the urban district. In some ways, he too saw his role as a special education teacher in an urban district as a savior. Additionally, Nick and Stacey's deficit-based views of communities of color presented themselves in terms of behaviors. Nick presented this view indirectly when speaking about suspension rates of African American males. As presented in Chapter 4, when Nick spoke about the influence of PBIS in reducing the rates of disciplinary action for African American males, he also mentioned how there may be "cultural differences" tied into the differences in behaviors. The example he provided indicated that in some cultures it may be appropriate to "call out loudly." He follows up in his journal to say that "in some cultures it may be appropriate to retaliate physically when someone pushes you." While not explicitly mentioned, Nick's response suggests that he attributes a negative, aggressive behavior to the culture of African American males.

Finally, Stacey tied deficit based views of race and culture more towards her paraprofessionals from racially and culturally non-dominant backgrounds.   This was evident when she spoke about "voice" and the differences between her "sweet and innocent" voice, as

equated with being a "white female" as opposed to her African American aides. While not directly stated, this pointed again to the generalization about the aggressiveness of African Americans.

Therefore, most special education teacher participants had some prejudiced attitudes that aligned with a deficit-based perspective of students and/or staff of color. Althea did not seem to perpetuate deficit beliefs about her students and staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and seemed to have more intersectional views of race and culture than the other participants. In some cases participants remedied these behaviors by self-reflection and discussion, and in other cases, these beliefs went unchallenged.

Student-centered beliefs. All special education teacher participants, despite lack of confidence with the term culturally responsive, were engaging in some form of culturally responsive instruction; which was just "good teaching." Participants shared their own stories with their students and used those stories to recognize and embrace differences.

Althea was the only participant who felt confident about her abilities to be culturally responsive. Of all participants, Althea also gave the most concrete examples of how she regularly engaged her students in learning which centered on different cultural backgrounds. Althea explained that some of the ways she did this was through festivals celebrating non-mainstream holidays like "Kwanzaa and Chinese New Year," as well as providing students with "culturally diverse reading" and literary representations of diverse groups of people through literature and history. When I asked Althea whether she thought of herself as a culturally responsive educator, she replied by saying she was just a "good educator" and that really speaking, culturally responsive education is "just education…it shouldn't have to be defined that way." Althea raised an important issue about culturally responsive teaching.

Stacey tried to be cognizant of how her students' backgrounds and experiences might influence their performance in school, and worked to reflect and create understanding. In her journal response to a question posed about whether she thought behaviors were culturally specific, Stacey recognized how behaviors can be stereotyped for particular communities. Stacey provided an example of a Mexican-American student in her class and how she ensured that she was sensitive to the fact that the student's cultural background might contribute to her shyness around other males in the classroom. Here Stacey worked not to overgeneralize about the student; she knew the individual family well enough to say that the family dynamics were playing out in this way. She ensured, however, that this was "not always the case" with "cultural differences," and remained open to the fact that she might see different dynamics, even within cultural groups.

Rebecca, also was aware of her own background and experiences when thinking about her students. Rebecca was very open with her students about the fact that she attended private schools growing up and came from a middle class background. Rebecca gave her students the opportunities to share their backgrounds and experiences with her, and left this reciprocity open in her work with students with disabilities from culturally and racially diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, Rebecca listened to her students share their experiences and reflected on her own experiences in relation to theirs and think about the overall context in which they lived, the broader implications of being a student with a disability in an urban district.

While Nick did not acknowledge his status as a white male outright, he did suggest that his background varied from that of his students and worked to bridge those differences through family communication. Nick believed that relationships with his students' families would provide him with insight and understanding of different cultural values. He believed in

communication with families which included "check ins" and reporting of positive as well as negative news.

Claudia also developed strong relationships with families of her students. Claudia made sure that students with significant disabilities were given opportunities to develop socially and emotionally in addition to academically, by accessing community programs. She said that she would "help the student with homework afterschool" if "mom agreed to take him to Special Olympics." She also ensured sensitivity to differences in some of her students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who were also from low socioeconomic backgrounds. For a student who could not bring his own gym clothes to school, for example, Claudia "bought him clothes" and they "would wash them at school."

Therefore, all participants took a stake in thinking about their own backgrounds and experiences as related to their students. By examining their own backgrounds and experiences, Rebecca and Claudia used these components to inform their interactions and instruction directly with students. Nick and Stacey also ensured that they worked towards understanding of student differences in culture by reaching out to families of the students. Finally, Althea infused her instruction with elements of diversity and helped expose her student to differences directly.

Critically conscious. A subset of participants moved beyond the student-centered views of race and culture to more critically conscious perspectives. For Rebecca, this was where she began to discuss intersectionality between race and class and how she understood differences between geographical locations of schools (hill schools versus flatland schools) and how money and visibility were tied into these contexts. Rebecca seemed to have an awareness of how race and class intersected along these lines and influenced communities of color in terms of educational opportunities. Her discussion of some of these more structural and contextual

components of education as they influenced her students' lives suggested that, at times, she had critically conscious views.

Furthermore, Claudia and Althea were both heavily involved with community based organizations within Rockport which fought for additional resources for schools. Claudia was, and continues to be, heavily involved in community activism with her school, its' students, and families. During our last interviews, Claudia remarked how she was working directly with the community in the district to advocate for better contracts for teachers and resources for families within the district. Althea also mentioned this in terms of activism around supporting teachers in being able to provide students with more equitable resources and supports. All of these teachers moved beyond beliefs centered around their students from racially and culturally non-dominant backgrounds to beliefs that also pushed to understand and challenge existing inequities.

Therefore, all special education teacher participants had beliefs about race and culture that were (a) deficit based, (2) student centered, and, for some participants, (3) critically conscious. Like beliefs about disability, these beliefs point to an overall theme of shifting and complex beliefs that change across time and intersectional points.

Intersecting Beliefs about Disability, Race, and Culture

All participants shared certain intersectional beliefs about disability, race, and culture. The following table (Table 3) lists each special education participant's intersectional beliefs about disability, race, and culture to review findings from Chapter 4. This section will then describe common patterns across special education participant beliefs and attitudes as well as any unique views and intersections.

The intersecting beliefs presented by each special education teacher participant indicated several common themes and patterns. The overall-cross case patterns found among special

education teacher participants fell into three main categories: (1) the discussion of disproportionate rates of African American students, (2) access to supports and services for students with disabilities, and (3) high expectations for students with disabilities from non-dominant backgrounds. Each of these areas is discussed in the following sections.

Disproportionality. Predominantly, special education teacher participants who taught students with high incidence disabilities (mild to moderate disabilities) were more likely to mention the issue of disproportionality of African American students in terms of identification for special education. One special education teacher of low incidence disabilities also

Table 3

Intersecting Beliefs about Disability, Race, and Culture

Participant Name	Intersectional Beliefs about Disability, Race, and Culture
Nick Harlan	Nick mentioned working with the families of individuals with disabilities when thinking about these individuals with disabilities from non-dominant backgrounds. He believes in a system that supports all students with varying abilities in the most inclusive environment possible and thus believes in PBIS for individuals who might be "at risk" for segregation from the general education setting. Nick also believed that all students, with all abilities and from all backgrounds, should be able to find accessible services in their neighborhood school.
Althea Lee Miller	Althea discussed the awareness that there is a disproportionate number of African American boys identified for special education services and links this to the achievement of African Americans throughout history/the marginalization of people of color. Althea was cognizant of the fact that all of the students she worked with in a classroom for mild to moderate disabilities were Black and thought deeply about who received what kinds of services.
Stacey Keiser	Stacey mentioned not wanting to generalize the behaviors of her students to their cultural and racial backgrounds indicating that behaviors and attitudes can be culturally specific but could easily be part of personality differences between individuals. She was aware of how her own background as a white woman may play into her own interpretations of particular situations with her students with disabilities and her aides. Stacey also expressed an interest in reducing stigma for her students with disabilities by having general education peers support each other in their class thereby promoting a respectful, supportive relationship.

Rebecca Kingsley	Rebecca discussed the issue of over representation of African American males in special education. She talked about how special education, how labels problematize individuals from non-dominant background, and how external influences such as gang violence and drugs, can influence her students' desire to learn and be successful in school. Rebecca used labels to inform her views on placement and some of their abilities.
Claudia Aguilar	Claudia discussed how she had lived experiences as being misidentified as having a language barrier and how that informed her practice as a teacher. She worked with staff and colleagues to understand racial/cultural differences and meeting overall student needs…expecting success from each student.

mentioned disproportionality in terms of disciplinary rates. Another special education teacher of low-incidence disabilities mentioned that she did not work with too many individuals whom she thought of as misidentified or overrepresented within her class, but discussed how it was an overall problem in the field, especially within her own experiences growing up. The final participant discussed disproportionality, but also felt that it was not an issue directly related to her particular students, but was more of an issue for high incidence disabilities.

Rebecca and Althea both worked with students with students with high incidence (mild to moderate) disabilities within the Rockport district. When asked about their overall beliefs about race and culture as they related to students with disabilities, both participants mentioned immediately mentioned the issue of disproportionality within special education. Althea noticed that many of her students that year were Black males and was skeptical about the district's overall system of identifying these students for her program. Additionally, she reflected on the overall stigma that this created not only for students, but also for how they were perceived within the overall school community. As she said, "that's all they're seeing is the African Americans are in the special education class." Her school setting was very diverse, including a large variety of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, yet the majority of her students were African American males. She understood that there were long term consequences associated with placing African American males in a segregated special education classroom.

Rebecca also picked up on these long term consequences and mentioned them during her interviews. She mentioned how the overrepresentation of African American students in special education, particularly in the case of "invisible" high incidence disabilities, had a detrimental effect on their overall life circumstances. Furthermore, she said "when kids are labeled MR/ID... it carr [ies] this idea with it [as associated with]... of limitations...of the student and what they might be limited to, when it's not always accurate." She worried that being placed in special education could sometimes limit these students' life chances for "certain jobs, services, or opportunities". Rebecca also indicated that students with a label of emotionally disturbed may also be stigmatized and prevented from holding particular jobs. African American males are 1.7 to 2 times as likely as White counterparts to be labeled EBD (Oswald & Coutinho, 2001). Here, Rebecca indicates that there is additional stigma attached to African American males who hold the EBD label. Rebecca indicated that this stigma starts in the school system but can translate to other societal contexts and impede overall life chances.

The other three special education teacher participants, Nick, Stacey, and Claudia, all worked as inclusive support teachers for students with low incidence (moderate to severe) disabilities. Despite not having too many experiences with seeing disproportionality firsthand, all three teachers did mention it as a major issue within the field, especially when asked about their beliefs related to the intersections of disability with race and culture. They also it as a problem more generally in society. Nick clearly articulated that it was problematic. Illustrating his concerns by saying a lot of the students he saw getting suspended or facing other disciplinary actions were predominantly African American males. While Nick wasn't entirely clear why, he understood that it was a huge problem in the field and that expectations for African American males were severely skewed in the school system.

Stacey and Claudia also briefly mentioned the issue of disproportionality and the problematic nature of having one group of individuals from a particular racial/cultural background be overrepresented in special education. Claudia reflected on her own risk of being identified as an English language learner, and Stacey recognized that the problem existed for many of the students with low-incidence disabilities at her high school. Both teachers took a similar approach to discussing it which was solution-based. Claudia discussed how she worked to minimize her own biases through collaboration with school staff while Stacey mentioned creating more organic supports for all students with disabilities, including a classroom culture of respect among peers with and without disabilities from all different backgrounds.

Therefore, all special education teacher participants shared their thoughts and ideas about disproportionality within the field of special education. All felt that it was a serious problem that needed to be addressed at the school level, which would help curb stigmatization of African American males in society. In their own ways, each participant also worked towards reducing over identification. This included (a) building a strong classroom culture and school community, (b) engaging in PBIS to reduce rates of suspension, segregation, and dropout; and (c) holding high expectations for *all* students with respect to ability, race and culture.

Support. All special education teacher participants mentioned the need to ensure that students with disabilities from non-dominant backgrounds have access to supports and services which promote their overall success. Specifically, Althea mentioned the need to have authentic assessments or "checklists" that help identify the support needs of students with disabilities and provide them access to services. As it stood in her classroom last year, Althea mentioned feeling unclear about why certain students were getting more access to services while others were not able. She indicated that she understood that cultural capital contributed greatly to who was able

to get what and that some of her wealthier families, those from middle-class white families, were able to advocate more strongly for supports and services.

Claudia also suggested that this is what she found in her experiences. She also indicated that many of her wealthier families were able to "afford tutors" for their children, while some families could not afford to spend time with their children with disabilities completing homework or contributing money for school trips and uniforms. Claudia worked to ensure that her students from non-dominant and sometimes low-income backgrounds had opportunities that were similar to their peers from wealthier backgrounds. She created peer tutoring opportunities or tutored students herself afterschool, and sometimes paid for school trips with her own money so that her students could attend.

Nick, Stacey, and Rebecca, also indicated that they saw differences in who received direct support from the Rockport district and how this tied into overall socioeconomic status, race, and disability. All three indicated that race and class also intersected for many of their students and that this contributed to the amount of resources families could sometimes put into school. All three worked as strong advocates for their students to receive appropriate services and supports in school. Stacey for instance, worked directly with general education teachers to create peer supports in class for many of her students with disabilities. She held whole class meetings using ability awareness and talked to general education peers about disability and differences openly, therefore promoting an overall respectful environment and classroom culture.

High expectations. Additionally, special education teacher participants reported that they held high expectations for all of their students. All students, including students who were traditionally marginalized, were given opportunities to work hard and succeed in school. Claudia explained that she "pushed her students with disabilities" to succeed because she had

high expectations for them. She expected that all of her students with disabilities would "keep up with the homework" and access general education content within the middle school. She allowed her own classroom to function as more of a study hall, where students could come to finish class work or receive additional individualized supports, but for the majority of the time, students were expected to complete assignments and modified work based on the general education curriculum.

Althea also held high expectations for each of her students. She encouraged her students to keep journals and loved seeing them progress throughout the school year. Althea indicated that "seeing…growth" in her students was a rewarding experience for her, but more so for them. Having her students' raise expectations of themselves also had an impact on how they were seen by others within their "school…and community."

Rebecca also explained that she held high expectations for her students. She pushed them to graduate from high school and move on to postsecondary education or fulfilling work. Rebecca explained that her school's overall focus was on college and that she too wanted to see her students with disabilities attend college. She explained that it can sometimes "be challenging to help students feel academically successful and help them feel like they actually want to do the work for themselves and that they know they can do it" but she perseveres. Many of Rebecca's students who graduated went on to pursue postsecondary education at either a community college or local state school.

Nick and Stacey also held high expectations for their students. Both ensured that students had opportunities for meaningful participation in their inclusive classrooms. Both special education teachers worked with their general education teachers and other school professionals to establish relationships that supported the success and growth of their students.

This philosophy translated into their overall high expectations for learning for all of their students.

Therefore, participants' beliefs, attitudes, and views about the intersections of disability, race, and culture problematized disproportionality, and worked to ensure a supportive environment for their students. Additionally, all participants ensured that they moved to challenge their students and push them to succeed in all realms of their lives including socio/emotional as well as academically. Indicators of success were seen in talking to all participants and included seeing students graduate from high school, seeing students attend college, having students who placed importance on their own transition, and having students make gains which raise expectations of people with disabilities from non-dominant backgrounds.

Special Education Teacher Beliefs about Disability, Race, and Culture and Retention Decisions

Special education teacher participants all had some points at which their overall beliefs, and perspectives about disability, race, and culture influenced their retention decisions in special education and/the urban district. These intersections were often unique and complex, however, some overlap existed. Three main areas of overlap among special education teacher beliefs and perspectives on disability, race, and culture and retention existed within participants individual details about: (1) deficit perspectives within the large urban district; (2) critical views of education at odds with district mandates; and, with respect to retention in general, (3) non-committal responses to overall indication to continue working as a special education teacher in a large urban district.

Deficit Perspectives within the Large Urban District

   As mentioned in the section about beliefs related to race and culture, all participants had

some level of deficit perspectives related to students and or staff of color within special

education. Additionally, all participants had some level of medicalized views about disability,

which compartmentalized students according to label and overall functionality. In all cases,

these kinds of beliefs tended to be exacerbated by continued employment in special education

within the urban district.

   For Rebecca, in particular, lack of teacher training and beliefs about her students of color

and their inability to "prioritize education" were in line with a deficit based view of families of

her students. Additionally, Rebecca's beliefs and attitudes about special education as a place,

versus a set of supports and services for students with disabilities suggested that she did not

necessarily believe that *all* students deserved to be included in general education settings. In

many ways, therefore, Rebecca fell in line with these overall beliefs perpetuated by special

education and the district and remained in the district which held these views. These deficit

beliefs, which Rebecca harbored, were fostered and continue to be fostered in the urban school

context. Rebecca also chose to remain within the system of special education and the large,

urban district, which fostered these views. While this was certainly not the only reason she

stayed, the context did support her overall deficit-based views.

   By contrast, Nick's moved out of the system of urban education, though he continued to

work in the field of special education. Nick had some deficit views, particularly as they related to

behaviors of African American males. Like Rebecca, Nick was alternatively certified and drawn

to teaching in an urban special education context by a need to provide a service to the

communities and students with disabilities present in Rockport.   Both participants, in some

ways, took a savior approach to working with high need communities. By contrast, however, Nick decided to leave the district, while Rebecca stayed, both for their own unique reasons.

Stacey also held a small set of deficit-based views of her paraprofessionals. In her last interview, she described how this was a key issue for her in deciding to leave the district and that she was starting to work through some of these issues. She mentioned how she felt "not strong enough" in "setting parameters" with paraprofessionals, but then went on to describe her frustrations with "them." She mentioned an instance where she "had a [paraprofessional] who was falsifying her time reports" and how she "went directly to the principal." When reflecting on this situation, Stacey recognized that she might have tried talking directly to the paraprofessional rather than reporting her, but still tended to describe her paraprofessionals in terms of how she had difficulty "managing them." Ultimately, Stacey's deficit-based views of paraprofessionals and the strain of her relationships with her staff members contributed to her overall stress levels and became an important piece of why she left Rockport. She did suggest, however, that she was interested in "improving relationships with staff" in the future. Chapter 6 will discuss the overall implications for continuing to hold deficit beliefs about communities of color within the broader context of education and teaching.

Critical Views

Some special education teacher participants also held critical views of disability and/ or race and culture. Critical views of disability, race, and culture and overall social justice approaches to teaching tended to fall at odds with district and state mandates. This led to dissonance and frustration on the parts of Althea and Claudia. Indeed, it may be that the dominant discourse in education is driving out some of the most passionate "risk takers" out of the field.

As Althea explained in her journal that she left the field because of the structured nature of schooling.

> I think part of this was because I think of teaching as a very linear progression; you sit in one classroom with one set of students. I wasn't as excited by the traditional sitting at the desk, raising hands kind of structure of schooling. I find myself to be more of an out of the box or artistic person. My current position working in afterschool intervention will allow me to reach more students. I feel like I can reach students in this setting outside of the constraints of the four walls of the classroom.

The structure of the Rockport district, in some cases, constrained the ways in which participants could engage with and support their students. Although all special education teacher participants had remained in the district between 5-9 years, they all still felt limited in what was possible for them as teachers. For Althea, working in after school gave her the opportunity to provide her students with more supports without the fear of being fired for being creative.

Claudia also discussed how the district's insistence on employing Teach for America cohort members to work in Rockport schools has also limited what is possible within the district and field. Claudia directly addressees this by pointing out how Teach for America is shifting the culture of teaching by encouraging younger, without families, who could dedicate themselves solely to the profession.

Claudia's own beliefs of disability, race, and culture were often deeper, and more complex than some of the other participants. Claudia's work with families both within and outside of school, her high expectations for her students with disabilities, and her focus on building opportunities for her students with disabilities through academic and social/emotional inclusion all spoke to her critical beliefs of all of these areas. As she later described, she felt less

committed overall to remaining within the district as a special education teacher long term; though she returned the year after data collection.

Non-Committal

Regardless of whether special education teacher participants were alternatively certified or traditionally certified, left the district/field or stayed, all participants of this study had ambivalence towards the field and especially working in the Rockport district.   When teachers who decided to stay were asked if they thought about teaching special education in an urban district as a lifelong career, they were less likely to strongly commit to the profession and/or context.

Rebecca had been teaching in the district for 5 years, which was 3 years beyond her initial commitment to the field and her district as outlined by her affiliation with TFA. When I asked her whether she planned on continuing to teach for the rest of her career, she responded without committing either way.

> my answer is...I'm gonna do it now until I don't like it anymore. Most of the time it has not made sense to do anything else, …we should do [take the GRE] just in case … but it's hard to plan...for anything else, even if I wanted to do something else...but I wouldn't even know what I want to do...this part is 5 years of teaching...I would probably love grad school, but...no... I'll do it until I don't like it anymore.

Rebecca was non-committal about her desire to continue teaching special education in the Rockport district. For young professionals like herself, this may be directly tied into the opportunity cost associated with teaching (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006).   Rebecca may be able to find better opportunities through graduate school or another profession that provides her with better resources and salary. She also indicated that there was a risk of getting fired or

having federal mandates which backfire when she says "incase shit blows and I gotta get out." This suggests that while opportunity cost drives special education teachers in urban school districts out of the field, the district mandates may also play a role (Heilig & Vasquez, 2010; Larabee, 2010).

Like Rebecca, Claudia also planned on taking the GRE and attending graduate school at some point down the road. Although she was the most veteran teacher of participants and the most dedicated to providing opportunities for her students both within and outside of the school context Claudia was also the special education teacher who indicated feeling the most stressed and overwhelmed. Splitting away from Stacey, having a larger caseload, having her own family, and lacking time to eat lunch or use the restroom all contributed to Claudia's overall stress levels. Therefore, she too, felt non-committal about continuing to work in the Rockport district as a special education teacher. Conversations with Claudia led to discussions about graduate school and a shared interest in getting a Ph.D. in Special Education. While the year after data collection, Claudia returned to her same placement in the Rockport district as a special education teacher, she too. "started to re-examine...my experience... …well [what] can [I] do...to become a better... I'm gonna start taking my studying for the GRE and maybe go after a PhD program in Special Ed."

Therefore, both Rebecca and Claudia saw the GRE and going to graduate school as plausible alternatives to teaching special education in Rockport down the road. While Rebecca did not specify what field she planned on going into, she mentioned that it would be something "social justicy" or related to her work as a teacher in Rockport. Claudia specifically wanted to go into special education as she began to think more about some of the larger implications for the field.

Nick, Stacey and Althea all left the Rockport district and pursued positions either outside of special education (for Althea) or outside of the urban district (for Nick). Of the three, Stacey seemed the most committed to staying within the field. She indicated that she may move up to a transition program, working with adults as they exit the school system and move into vocational work but planned on staying in special education long term; though not necessarily in urban education.

Althea also mentioned that her afterschool program position might be a temporary job for her until "something better comes along." Althea was particularly thoughtful about the opportunity cost associated with teaching given her overall loans from earning a credential and caring for her growing family and therefore would likely continue to search for positions that offered better pay.

Lastly, Nick was committed to staying within education, but it also depended on how things worked out with his family situation. If he and his wife had additional children, he might consider changing fields. Like Rebecca and Claudia, when asked about whether he planned on staying in special education, Nick replied "for now."

Therefore, all participants expressed non-committal statements regarding their intent to stay within education long-term. Particularly, very little commitment was expressed for remaining in the urban school district by all participants, though some did think about staying within the field of education. Both Stacey and Claudia, who were co-teachers and traditionally certified, were committed to remaining in the field of education. Rebecca, Nick, and Althea were committed to remaining in education for the time being but were not committed long term particularly because of the opportunity cost of remaining in education.

Summary

Chapters 4 and 5 provided the case studies and cross case analysis from 5 special education teacher participants who worked within the Rockport School District, an urban district. Specifically Chapter 4 examined the key sources of beliefs about disability, race, and culture held by special education teacher participants and how those beliefs intersected to inform retention decisions. Chapter 5 provided a cross case analysis which revealed reasons why special education teacher participants decided whether to continue teaching in an urban school district by examining contributing factors as well as cross case beliefs about disability, race, and culture as they informed overall retention.

Chapter 4 revealed that each participant held multilayered, constantly changing beliefs related to disability, race, and culture. These beliefs highlighted sources such as background and experiences with these areas, college education and/or teacher preparation philosophies, as well as experiences teaching in the classroom. In chapter 5 these key sources were then deconstructed into factors influencing retention as well as shared beliefs by participants. The role of family obligations as well as teacher salaries as these contributed to overall retention is also highlighted in chapter 5. For some of the participants, the overall opportunity cost of teaching was not enough to keep them within education long-term.

All participants continued working in education, but few had aspirations of remaining as educators for their whole lives. This speaks to a larger issue within the field in which even the most dedicated individuals are driven out of the field through systemic issues facing education and perceptions held about being a teacher. The next chapter, Chapter 6, will discuss the implications of this dissertation study, as well as provide recommendations for the future of special education teacher retention in urban districts in terms of research and practice.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to understand how beliefs about disability, race, and culture influenced special education teachers' decisions about whether to remain in a large, urban school district and/or the field. Three main research questions framed this study:

1. How do special education teachers explain their reasons for remaining in or leaving an urban district?

2. What are the key sources of beliefs which special education teachers have related to disability, race, and culture?

3. How do beliefs about disability, race, and culture intersect to inform special education teacher retention in a large urban district?

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how findings from this study confirm and/or expand on existing literature in the areas of special education teacher retention and special education teacher beliefs about disability, race, and culture. This chapter includes implications for teacher education, urban school districts, special education teachers, and educational researchers.

Discussion

The findings from this study support the previous claims that retention of special education teachers is influenced by a variety of factors (Billingsley, 2007; Billingsley, 2005 Grismer & Kirby, 1987; Guarino et al., 2006; Brownell et al, 1997) and that teacher beliefs are multifaceted (Parajes, 1992; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Fang, 1996). Additionally, findings from this study confirmed that teacher beliefs stem from sources such as teacher preparation (Richardson, 1996; Lavigne, 2011; Eckert, 2013), school experiences

(Parajes, 1992), and personal backgrounds (Parajes, 1992; Rice, 2006).   Before this study, however, there was limited information on how beliefs contributed to retention/attrition decisions for special education teachers (Billingsley, 2004; Eckert, 2013); especially beliefs about disability, race, and culture.

Special education teacher beliefs regarding disability, race, and culture are shifting and complex (Artiles, 2013) much like these social markers themselves (Artiles, 2013; Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Erevelles & Minear, 2011; Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2005). Special education teacher participants of this study varied in their individual and cross case beliefs about disability, race, and culture and in the ways these beliefs influenced their overall retention/attrition decisions. The overall findings and recommendations from this study follow the research questions and results from Chapters 4 and 5.

How do special education teachers explain their reasons for remaining in or leaving an urban district?

This research question spoke to the overall factors which influenced special education teachers' decisions about whether to remain in the Rockport district. Individually, each participant had unique reasons for deciding whether they would stay or leave the district; though across participants, three main factors seemed to be the strongest influences: financial issues, family obligations, and students. These findings confirm findings from other research reporting that special education teacher retention is influenced by factors such as salary (Kelly, 2004; Guarino et al., 2006; Billingsley, 2007), family obligations (Guarino et al., 2006; Billingsley, 2007; Wayne, 2000; Kirby & Grismer, 1991; Brownell et al., 1997), and students (Billingsley, 2005; Billingsley, 2007).

Financial issues. Issues related to financing teacher education programs, living expenses, and salary being commensurate with workload were all factors that special education teacher participants mentioned when discussing their decisions about whether to remain in the field of special education and/or district. Within the field, issues related to low wages and feelings of being overworked seemed to be commonly cited among reasons to leave (Billingsley, 2007). Issues related to financing special education teacher education programs, however, seemed to be unique. Indeed, McLeskey, Tyler, and Flippin (2004) found that many programs were incentivizing teaching through programs such as loan forgiveness and financial bonuses. Additionally, there is an increasing trend of incentivizing alternative certification programs for special education teachers, especially in states like California and Ohio, which are hiring teachers through intern programs (Darling Hammond & Berry, 2006). This suggests that while incentives are available upfront through alternative certification routes, there are additional unanticipated costs of tuition and licensing paperwork.

With the exception of Rebecca, the participants found the unanticipated costs related to finishing their credentials and Master's degrees created financial hardship. Although completion of both of these would have contributed to raising their levels on the salary schedule (Hanushek, 2007); the increase was not commensurate with the costs.

Additionally, Certo and Fox (2002) highlighted that teacher salaries were not keeping up with the growth rate of the economy. Therefore, many teachers leave the field due to living expenses associated with working in large, metropolitan areas. Special education teachers in Rockport also felt this issue. As Nick mentioned, he would often hear teachers talk about how they had families and "lived in a one bedroom" because of high rent prices. Therefore, being able to subsist on low wages as a special education teacher in a large, metropolitan city was

becoming more difficult for participants, especially as the majority of them had families to think about.

Family obligations. Family obligations are often cited among reasons that teachers decide to leave the field of education altogether (Guarino et al., 2006; Wayne, 2000; Kirby & Grismer, 1991) or special education (Billingsley, 2007; Brownell et al., 1997). For Nick, Stacey, and Althea, who all left the district and/or field at the end of the year, family obligations played an important role in their overall decisions. Nick in particular cited that the main factor that contributed to his decision to leave was that his wife was pregnant with their first child and that they wanted to move closer to her family once the baby was born. While Stacey was not having kids right away, she also wanted to "start a family" and cited this as a reason that she left the district. Additionally, Althea, who had two children during the time she was working in the Rockport district, explained that her "family is growing" and that, for her, it was not affordable to stay in teaching with a family to support.

Although Claudia decided to stay in the district, she expressed feeling overwhelmed by some of the time constraints special education teachers had to put in. Hargreaves (1996) explained that there is a teaching culture which influences the ways in which teachers work within the context of demands, school context, and community. For Claudia, this teaching culture created a hardship for her in terms of being able to spend time with her family. Because she was putting in extra hours of work and providing students with additional services outside of the classroom context, she often felt that she did not have enough time for her family. The majority of special education teacher participants, therefore, expressed issues of family obligations as influences in their attrition/retention decisions.

Unique to this study, Claudia's beliefs about teaching culture suggested that alternative certification programs are creating a culture of teaching that privileges young persons without families. Indeed, this is the exact recruitment strategy of programs such as Teach for America. It is known that Teach for America's progressive neoliberal agenda is creating a stepping stone for young professionals to get an "urban experience" before leaving the field for a more lucrative career in business, law, or medicine (Lahann & Reagan, 2011). What is unknown, however, is the extent of the effect of such programs like Teach for America on systematic beliefs about who a teacher is, particularly in large, urban school districts like Rockport.

Students. All special education teacher participants had strong ties to their students in Rockport and to working with students in general. This strong desire to continue working with students meant that all special education teacher participants remained within the educational career track, even those who left the district and field of special education. As Eckert (2013) suggested, strong beliefs in student success are important for teacher retention. In some cases, this was not enough, however, for the participants of this study. Even those who were most strongly invested in their students' overall development, like Claudia and Stacey, felt compelled to leave the district, though not the field of special education.

What are the key factors which influence special education teachers' beliefs about disability, race, and culture?

Beliefs support teachers in interpreting, planning, and making decisions regarding teacher practices and play an important role in the transfer of knowledge into action (Abelson, 1979; Bandura, 1986; Lewis, 1990; Nespor, 1987; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog., 1982; Rokeach, 1968; Schommer, 1990). Previous research on the sources of teacher beliefs stem from a variety of sources such as teacher preparation programs, instructional and/or

school based experiences, and personal experiences (Grisham et al, 2000; Lanier & Little, 1986; Richardson, 1996). Additionally, teacher beliefs can be shaped, developed, and/or changed through teacher education programs (Richardson, 1996).

In this study, the beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, and philosophies expressed by special education teacher participants were also influenced by teacher education, personal experiences, and experiences with schooling. The ways in which these participants shared these expressions gave me an overall deeper understandings of the complexity of beliefs. Furthermore, the participants of this study did not have opportunities to develop extensive beliefs as pre-service teachers in teacher education programs because most were certified *after* they had already started to work in special education programs. This meant that participants strongly attributed sources of beliefs about disability, race, and culture to their personal experiences and the school communities where they taught.

Sources of beliefs about disability. Harmon, Casa-Hendrickson, and Neil (2010) explained that it is important for teacher education programs to begin advocating for meaningful, inclusive opportunities for students with significant disabilities. The majority of special education teacher participants who worked with students with significant disabilities in this study also supported a philosophy of inclusive education for these students as advocated by their teacher education programs. For these three participants (Nick, Claudia, and Stacey), all explained that their teacher education program provided them with opportunities to engage in learning about the importance of inclusive education for students with disabilities.

Additionally, however, some participant formed their beliefs about disabilities through personal experiences. While most participants used the school based context to express beliefs about disability, some participants had out of school experiences with individuals with

disabilities. Claudia, Althea, and Stacey had the most experiences interacting with individuals with disabilities outside of their special education teaching experiences. For Claudia and Althea, these experiences were as a caregiver. Despite this, however, both participants seemed to view these experiences differently. For Claudia, she was able to use these early experiences as a process for shifting beliefs as she moved into more inclusive teaching opportunities. Althea seemed to internalize her experience into a role as caregiver to her students with disabilities within the school context.

Nick and Rebecca in particular had very limited experiences interacting with individuals with disabilities outside of the school context. Therefore, the majority of their beliefs about disability were based on their teacher education program (for Nick) and school based experiences (for both). While Nick's teacher education program and mentors supported him in developing a philosophy of inclusive education for students with disabilities, his thoughts about individuals with disabilities outside of this context were limited. He thought about the types of programs or school based supports individuals with disabilities would have rather than the whole person. Furthermore, Rebecca did not even have a comprehensive teacher education program to support school based beliefs about inclusive education. Therefore, her limited experiences interacting with individuals with disabilities coupled with her lack of preparation led her to continue to refer to the placement of students with disabilities and place based definitions of disability overall.

For two of the participants (Claudia and Stacey), the unique relationship formed through attending the same teacher education program and subsequently spending their first years as co-teachers in an inclusive middle school setting also strongly shaped their overall beliefs, especially as they related to inclusion and working with individuals with disabilities. As

Billingsley (2004) suggested, working as co-teachers can promote retention, especially in the first few years of teaching. The idea of job-sharing provided both Claudia and Stacey with a structure that helped them balance workload and cope with the "stress of the first couple years" (Stacey). This suggests that their strong teacher education program and co-teaching support helped them develop more complex understandings of individuals with disabilities. Claudia in particular was able to move outside of the school frame of reference when thinking about disability and learning to think of disability as difference.

Overall beliefs, attitudes, and perspectives about disability. By gathering sources of special education teachers' beliefs about disability, I was able to begin to understand their expressed beliefs about disability. Rice (2006) provided frameworks for constructing beliefs about disability and knowledge frameworks for thinking about special education. These beliefs ranged from positivist to interpretivist to emancipatory. Within the interviews and journal reflections I gathered, the participants presented similar types of beliefs which varied across time and context. Overall, beliefs about disability varied across participants, but tended to fall into categories mentioned in Chapter 5 of medicalized, student-centered, and inclusive. These categories paralleled Rice's (2006) frameworks of knowledge construction in special education. Specifically, participants had beliefs which were in line with positivist constructions (medicalized beliefs), interpretivist constructions (student-centered/inclusive beliefs) and emancipatory (student-centered/inclusive beliefs).   This meant that participants had ideas that moved along this continuum rather than remaining static.

I refrained from categorizing any one special education teacher as simply holding deficit beliefs and/or critical views. All had moments when their views shifted into all of the framings of disability. As Artiles (2013) remarked, "From a contrapuntal standpoint, we are compelled to

cross the liminal spaces between different disability lenses" (p. 332).   Therefore, it was important to think about contrapuntalism, which links ideas and practices normally thought to be in contradiction with each other, in understanding beliefs about disability.

Sources of beliefs of race and culture. Like the sources of beliefs about disability, beliefs about race and culture for special education teacher participants stemmed most directly from their experiences as teachers and/or their personal experiences. Althea and Claudia, who both came from non-dominant backgrounds were quicker to name their own experiences and backgrounds as racial and cultural minorities in addition to their experiences with students and their schools, while Rebecca, Nick, and Stacey focused more on schools, families, and their students.

Participants, however, never mentioned linking any of their sources of beliefs about race and culture to their teacher education programs. This is not uncommon, given that most teacher education programs still continue to perpetuate the kinds of practices mostly benefitting White, middle class individuals (Melnick & Zeichner, 1998). Furthermore, most teacher education programs either only include a single class on multicultural education or take on a racially or culturally homogenizing approach to approaching diversity within teacher education (Banks & Banks, 2009).

Additionally, when asked about how they were implementing culturally responsive pedagogy into their teaching, participants felt less than confident about their overall implementation and had difficulty coming up with examples. The only participant who was confidently able to do this was Althea, when she talked about how culturally responsive instruction was just "good instruction." Ladson-Billings (1995) expressed this when discussing how culturally relevant pedagogy is based on the principles of successful teachers and teaching. Althea was the only one

to provide concrete examples of implementing culturally responsive instruction with her students. Other participants were implementing some aspects of it, but had difficulty naming examples and felt less than confident about it overall.

Additionally, when referring to ways of being culturally responsive, Nick placed importance on being fluent in a myriad of different cultures. This suggests the idea that it is possible to know everything there is to know about someone's culture; however, "cultural groups are heterogeneous, and individuals' insider/outsider positions are negotiated and shifting in local contexts" (Trainor & Bal, 2014, p. 204). While he recognizes how difficult it might be, the idea that one can be "culturally fluent" in the culture of someone else is complex and indicates a need to address the meanings of culture more thoroughly through teacher preparation. Indeed, especially within special education teacher education programs there has been a lack of focus on multicultural education and supporting teachers in being culturally responsive educators (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Manning, 2012).

Overall beliefs and perspectives about race and culture.   Sleeter (1992) discussed how teacher beliefs about race tended to center on color-blind ideologies as well as single variable explanations for achievement differences seen between students of color and white students; also known as "culture of poverty" beliefs (Sleeter, 1995, p. 38). Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2004) discussed how teachers were often too quick to attribute student behaviors to their culture.

This was true of several participants in this study. Particularly, Stacey and Nick talked about how certain cultures tended engage in negative behaviors (as mentioned by Nick) and harsh tones (as mentioned by Stacey). Additionally, Rebecca spoke about how some families did not prioritize education, though in different ways. As Lareau (1987) and Auerbach (2007)

explain, the school system tends to prioritize the cultural capital of dominant groups, especially when looking at family engagement and involvement.

As with beliefs about disability, however, beliefs about race and culture were not static across participants either. Instead participants had beliefs that varied from deficit-based to student centered and culturally responsive, as well as critically conscious. The critically conscious views of special education teacher participants tended to highlight their levels of activism with respect to racially and culturally diverse communities. This was evidenced most clearly through Claudia and Althea who both took an active role in protesting against the marginalization of communities of color, specifically through school community meetings, union support for teachers, and standing side-by-side with families in advocating for more funding and resources for students in urban schools.

How do beliefs about disability, race, and culture intersect to inform special education teacher retention in a large urban district?

Intersectionality examines the influences of power dynamics in limiting the multidimensional experiences to single group dynamics (Crenshaw 1989). This study attempted to move past static definitions and understandings of beliefs disability, race, and culture, as they related to special education teachers' experiences and decisions about whether to remain in the field and/or urban district. The special education teachers' intersectional beliefs also included deficit views, critical views, and non-committal views, but retention was not always easily linked to these areas, as retention factors tended to be uniquely designed for each participant and hierarchical. Therefore, it is important to note that retention decisions included a combination of factors which influenced the decisions for each participant in addition to the intersections of beliefs and attitudes about disability, race, and culture.

Deficit views and disproportionality. Oswald and Coutinho (2001) explained that African American males are 1.7 to 2 times as likely as White counterparts to be labeled EBD. This speaks to one of the most pressing problems in the field of special education at the intersections of race, culture, and ability: disproportionality (Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Artiles, 2013). As Artiles (2013) goes on to explain, studies of intersections of race, culture, and ability, particularly as they relate to disproportionality have been predominantly quantitative in nature.

This study provided a more in-depth look at teachers' beliefs around the intersections of race, culture and ability, including those that might fall into deficit perspectives associated with issues such as disproportionality (Harry & Kalyanpur, 2009). While special education teacher participants were able to identify disproportionality as an issue within the overall system of special education, and a few within their own schools, most did not seem to understand how schools systems might be perpetuating disproportionate representations of students of color within special education (Artiles, 2013) and further, how their own beliefs and understandings of behaviors might be contributing (Harry & Kalyanpur, 2009). An example of this was Nick and his discussion about how he was involved in school-wide PBIS to reduce suspension rates in his school, but did not seem to understand why such high rates among African American males existed to begin with. None of the special education teacher participants of this study expressed any serious concern that their students were misidentified as having a high incidence disability and/or for special education services. Nick however made comparisons among some of the African American males at his school with other groups of students, with his discussion of "some cultures". Hibel, Farakas, and Morgan (2010) explained that teachers may refer students for special education because they are comparing with the "normative, referent group of the students' peers." For Nick, there was a tendency to make comparisons among the different

cultures of students, particularly in referencing the norm in terms of behavior. For Rebecca and Althea this was perhaps most poignant given that they worked closely with students with high incidence disabilities. Both of these teachers expressed concern over disproportionality in more general terms, but not as it specifically related to their own students.

The deficit beliefs held by special education teacher participants regarding the intersections of students with disabilities and communities of color seemed to be perpetuated by working in the Rockport district. From participants' descriptions, these views were commonly held within their schools and the overall district. These views prioritized classification of students into categories based on abilities and racial/cultural makeup. Ultimately, for Rebecca, this meant that she remained in the district while holding some of these more deficit beliefs. For Nick it meant moving to another special education placement, within a wealthier district. For Althea it was ultimately a rejection of the "linear fashion" of special education and teaching; which helped her in deciding to leave the district and special education for an after school program.

Critical views. Critical views of the intersections of social markers could lead to dissonance related to remaining within the system which perpetuates deficit based views of disability as well as race and culture (Boderick et al., 2006). For Claudia and Stacey, however, who seemed to hold more critical views about living within the same communities in which they taught, working with the same population of students in the same kinds of communities was important for both of them. The year after data collection, both of these participants continued to work in the same field and similar districts (Claudia stayed and Stacey moved to another urban district). Both, however, expressed a commitment to remaining within the field of special

education based on their beliefs about working to benefit of students with disabilities and communities of color.

Non-committal. Literature related to special education teacher retention/attrition tends to classify special education teachers as "leavers or stayers" (Billingsley, 2007, p. 12). By contrast, this study moves beyond traditional definitions to include how participants 'beliefs contributed to these decisions and helped them to construct knowledge in their educational practices. While all participants indicated discontent with the urban district and some expressed discontent with special education, the ways in which their beliefs informed these decisions and overall lack of commitment to staying in Rockport and/or special education were unique. Stacey and Claudia expressed a long term commitment to remaining in the field of special education, though there was no guarantee that they would stay in their current districts. For Claudia in particular, her commitment led to her to want to inform the field of special education through research; consequently, she is currently a doctoral student. Althea expressed some desire to remain in education, though she could not guarantee this long term. Nick expressed some interest in remaining in special education, but had no particular interest in working within urban education. Finally, Rebecca had an interest in continuing to work in a "social justicy" field, but did not guarantee that this would be within special education, urban education or the field of education at all. Like many TFA corps members, Rebecca indicated a desire to use her experiences working in Rockport and special education as stepping stones towards a better career (Baltodano, 2012).

Implications

Given the intersecting beliefs and ideas and complex retention decisions of participants presented in this dissertation study, there are several implications for research and practice

moving forward. Specifically, this section discusses the implications of this study for practice and future research.

Practice

This dissertation had several implications for special education teachers and their teaching practices. The next section discusses these implications for special education practice as suggested through teacher education and special education teacher school-based practices. Each of these aspects of practice is addressed below.

Teacher education. One of the most critical issues in the field of both special education and urban education is the number of underprepared teachers. As Boe, Cook, Bobbitt, and Terhanian (1998) indicate, about 32% of all entering special education teachers and 7.8% of continuing special education teachers are not fully certified. Additionally, within urban districts about 30% of all teachers have not even passed basic licensure examinations (Jacob, 2007). Similarly, the special education teacher participants recruited from this study were more often alternatively certified. In fact, none of them went through a long-term traditional program before beginning to teach in the Rockport district.

Additionally, for Rebecca and Nick, neither had experiences working in the field of special education prior to beginning to teach. This strongly underscores the lack of traditionally certified special education teachers working in large, urban districts which serve high numbers of students of color with disabilities (Melnick & Zeichner, 1998; Billingsley, 2007). Therefore, there is a very critical need for more teacher preparation programs which support special education teachers who are interested in urban education, and for programs which are tailored to address the unique needs of urban educational contexts (Banks & Banks, 2009).

Some university based teacher education programs are starting to include training in urban school districts through residency programs. Barry et al. (2008) suggest that Urban Teacher Residency programs hold great promise for staffing urban schools while providing comprehensive pedagogical instruction. These programs provide pre-service teachers with a one-year residency in urban schools with on-going mentorship and support. For example, Syracuse University has an Urban Inclusive Teacher Residency Program which capitalizes on both inclusive frameworks for special education and special education teachers' desires to work in large, urban school districts. This program is one of only a few urban teacher education programs offering special education without including an alternative or emergency certification process in addition. Therefore, it might be useful for teacher education programs to start adopting models that prepare special education teachers for large, urban contexts (see Appendix G for a model for Critical Special Education Teacher Education).

Special education professional development. Special education practice may also benefit from professional development that supports and aligns with the model of Critical Special Education Teacher Education (see Appendix G). Sparks (2002) indicated that professional development for teachers should include the following components: (a) a focus on deepening content knowledge and pedagogy; (b) opportunities for practice, research, and reflection; (c) embedded into teachers' work that takes place during school time; (d) sustainable; and (e) founded on collaboration between staff and leadership in solving problems related to teaching and learning. While all participants completed their credentialing programs, at least at a preliminary level, partnerships between university and districts to ensure on-going professional development would be important in supporting teachers with on-going learning around topics of disability, race, culture, and intersectionality. As suggested in Appendix G, teacher education

programs supporting this framework would encourage special education teachers to continue work around construction of knowledge around disability and intersections as facilitators of university connections as well as professional development in their districts. Having a direct impact on the material and information provided to special education teachers would increase buy-in and ensure that content is directly relevant to teachers' needs (Sparks, 2002).

The professional development work needed to begin to understand some of the theoretical ideas and foundations associated with disability, race, and culture seemed to have been all but eliminated in the Rockport district. While all of the participants expressed a high level of interest in professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals, this need was not being met by the district of interest *at all*. Most of the time, participants explained that the district would provide weekly or bi-weekly professional development opportunities which were repetitive or out of date with current research and/or best practices in the field. Therefore, professional development that is meaningful, and structured around special education teachers' immediate as well as overarching needs would be invaluable. Not only does professional development support teachers in building community and reducing stress, it also enables them to engage and reflect on their own practice and adds to the overall sense of professionalism within the field (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). It also has the potential to support special education teachers in developing deeper theoretical knowledge of the constructs of race, culture, and disability.

Changing the culture. Another important implication from this study had to do with the perception of teachers as it has been created through alternative certification programs. Changing the teacher culture is a critical piece to reforming the field. The increase in numbers of Teach for America corps members has created a corporatization of education and also shifted

societal perceptions of who teachers are and how they should perform. The perception of teacher as someone who dedicates their whole self, and all his/her time, to the field without any regard for personal health, wellness, and family is a myth that is being perpetuated through these programs and needs to shift. Active teachers involved in the contract negotiations at the district level are fighting for the right to shift these perceptions and take back the teacher culture. It is important for teachers, school leaders, and communities to support these efforts to change the culture of teaching through professionalism. Like other professional careers, teachers have a right to bathroom and lunch breaks and support a family. This implication specifically calls upon leadership and administration to ensure that special education teachers' time and work is valued and appreciated. Activities that support special education teacher and staff appreciation and stress reduction as well as time for breaks, family leave, and lesson planning preparation (prep time) should be included in contracts and enforced by administration in order to take back the culture of teaching.

Finally, the reflections provided by special education teachers from this study begged an important question: do we need retention or do we need reform? While much of the conversation around special education teacher retention has focused on keeping these teachers in classrooms, very little has focused on actually creating systematic reform within the field, especially within urban education. As mentioned in Chapter 2, definitions of urban districts are changing due to gentrification and the migration of communities of color (Posey-Maddox, 2013). These changes will come with their own unique sets of problems for communities of color by driving them out of long established neighborhoods. Therefore, there is a great need to think about reform as it pertains to special education and urban education.

Most of what participants are claiming as their rationale for leaving either the field of special education, and/or urban education stems from issues which are prominent within and/or across urban districts. This study speaks against a business as usual approach to thinking about special education and urban education retention. Instead of focusing on keeping special education teachers inside a system that, at its very foundation, is to sort, classify, and segregate communities of color, the time is ripe for changing the overall field and the ways in which it supports students with disabilities and the teachers who work with students with disabilities.

As suggested in Appendix G, a framework which empowers special education teachers to take ownership of and facilitate more meaningful experiences in terms of professional development, as well as provide opportunities that support these programs and events would be one way to begin systematic reform from within a district. As Clair and Adger (1999) suggest, the impetus for professional development should come from teachers themselves. Efforts at reform should include meaningful development that is supported by teachers and educational stakeholders such as administrators, families, district leaders, and university educators.

As Ball and Cohen (1999) suggest, embedding theory and reformist agendas into teaching is far from easy. However, such professional development should be centered in teaching and learning that is grounded in practice and uses examples from the classroom setting to engage in such critique (Ball & Cohen, 1999). Using specific examples from practice to then build into theories and frameworks of disability, race, and culture have the potential to extend special education teachers beliefs and practice.

Billingsley (2005) suggested, administrative support of special education teachers can be conducive to retention. Principals who treat special education teachers as valued members of the school "set a stage for parents, students, and teachers to feel part of the school community

(Billingsley, 2005, p. 120). Therefore, it is important that leadership both within individual school contexts and at the district level is on board when thinking about school and system based reform.

Research

In addition, this reform should not be limited to the practical context. There is a strong need for research within special education retention as well as special education teacher beliefs to move towards more intersectional approaches. Up until the point of this dissertation, few studies highlighted the importance of special education teacher beliefs in influencing special education teacher retention (Billingsley, 2007; Lavigne, 2011). Additionally, the literature around special education is just beginning to open up to the idea of multiple frameworks of disability in both research and conceptions of practice (Annamma et al., 2013; Artiles, 2013; Erevelles & Minear, 2010). Such frameworks would enable researchers to privilege the knowledge that special education teachers possess and additionally include the voices of people with disabilities in research. Up until now, the majority of research within special education focuses *on* individuals with disabilities rather than including them in the process. Similarly, when thinking about research focused on education and educational policies, there is a tendency to leave out the voices of the educators who work directly with students.

Future studies of special education teacher retention should focus on the beliefs of special education teachers, particularly as they relate to both expressed beliefs and beliefs in practice. It will be important in the future to gain trust and build relationships with school districts to work on both qualitative, mixed methods, and action-based research within special education classrooms and contexts. Studies of beliefs in practice can be connected back to expressed beliefs (Pajares, 1991) to provide both another point of comparison as well as indicate whether

there are disconnects between these two types of beliefs. In general, "beliefs are instrumental in defining tasks and selecting the cognitive tools with which to interpret, plan, and make decisions regarding such tasks; hence, they play a critical role in defining behavior and organizing knowledge and information" (Parajes, 1992, p. 325). The importance of expressed beliefs and beliefs in practice, therefore, hold in decisions such as whether special education teachers continue teaching. They also have the potential to inform teaching behaviors and understandings about disability, race and culture and the ways in which these constructs play out within the classroom and larger school structure.

Additionally, by incorporating diverse methodology, comparisons can be made among different research contexts with respect to special education teacher beliefs as they relate to overall retention decisions. For example, studies which incorporate surveys of special education teacher beliefs from a variety of urban districts could provide interesting opportunities to understand how differences in policies and practices from district to district influence special education teacher beliefs as they relate to retention decisions.   Surveying a large number of teachers from across a variety of districts and coupling this with interviews and observations could provide unique understanding of how different districts support special education teachers.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the earlier limitations, future studies could recruit a larger pool of special education teachers from different representative age groups as well as levels of experience. It would be useful to gain the perspectives of novice and expert teachers to understand how beliefs vary with time and experience and how retention decisions are formed at various stages of teaching. Comparisons could be made of special education teachers who were in their first year and those that were around for more than thirty years, for example. These experience gaps have the potential to yield unique beliefs about disability, race, and culture.

Specifically, it would be interesting to understand how working in special education for long periods of time contributes to beliefs shaped towards dominant discourses or if there are still some special education teachers who have stayed but maintained resistance against deficit-based beliefs. Such insights into beliefs based on experience could then inform teacher education, professional development and supports which would engage in fostering or changing beliefs of special education teachers.

Lastly, ethnographic research in which a researcher is immersed in the daily practices of special education teachers in an urban district would provide the greatest level of detail in terms of beliefs in practice as they directly relate to expressed beliefs. Specifically, ethnographic research would provide opportunities for in-the-moment supports and participation from special education teachers, and allow for the understanding of more complicated intersections of beliefs around disability, race, and culture. As Artiles (2013) suggested, there is benefit to thinking about more contrapuntal framings in research around intersectionality. Contrapuntal readings of research suggest moving beyond either or frameworks, such as either medical model or social constructivist model and instead focusing on how these two frameworks blend to create new understandings within school practices.

Most importantly, future studies should more deeply examine the role of alternative certification programs such as Teach for America on the overall shaping of teaching culture in large urban districts like Rockport. Specifically, future research is needed into how alternative certification programs are shifting the overall teacher culture in urban school districts from one of individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences, to a field for young persons who are transitioning into more lucrative careers.

Limitations

While every effort was made in this qualitative case study to ensure validity and trustworthiness, there were some limitations to this work. First, although repeated interviews were important to both accuracy of information and triangulation of data, they occurred at different points in the school year. This meant that perspectives on retention of teachers who were still in the urban district changed over time. Efforts were made to highlight these differences, especially in first year teachers who may change their beliefs and opinions more dramatically than more experienced teachers (Billingsley, 2007). These differences in beliefs over time may be used to inform future research in the area of special education retention.

Additionally, this study utilized information from one urban school district. Therefore, findings from the individual district do not transfer across settings in the urban districts across the United States. Generalizability, however, was not the goal of qualitative research in this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), and may come from future research which could utilize multiple districts across region. For this dissertation study, the specifics of the particular district and special education teachers were more important than the generality of special education teachers across urban districts (Creswell, 2008). Using one urban district allowed for a closer look at how the district operated in influencing beliefs and decisions to continue teaching. This in-depth view was valuable in understanding why special education teachers chose to remain there.

Additionally, while efforts were made to ensure that special education teachers came from both alternatively certified and traditional preparation programs before beginning to teach in the Rockport district, all special education teacher participants went through a program that was a faster track than a traditional certification program. Although the co-teaching pair, Stacey Keiser and Claudia Aguilar, represented teachers who had not participated in an alternative

licensure program such as TFA or TNTP, they still had not completed all of their certification requirements through their teacher preparation program *before* they began working in the district.   This is not, however, surprising for urban districts in the state as a whole. Finding traditionally certified teachers who had completed their coursework and field experiences in the district *before* they started working was challenging (Boe et al., 1998).

Finally, timings of interviews and observations depended heavily on (a) the schedules of participants involved, (b) the schedules of the schools in which the participants work, and (c) the district calendar. For example, while the academic year at a university typically goes until May, the district of interest continued instruction into June and typically had holidays such as spring break tie into Cesar Chavez Day. Although there was a particular time window in which interviews should have been scheduled, there were instances where interviews did not occur according to schedule. A careful understanding of individual participant schedules, school schedules and the overall district calendar was critical to timing interviews as well as selecting journal prompts which required lengthier or shorter responses. In qualitative data collection, it was important to maintain a degree of flexibility when working within educational settings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2008).

Conclusion

The majority of existing studies within the area of special education teacher retention have primarily focused on internal and external factors as they influence retention/attrition decisions (Billingsley, 2007; Boe, et al., 1989). Previous work has also looked at whether the focus within research and practice should be on retention or shortages within the field (Jacobs, 2007). Few studies, however, have examined the role of special education teacher beliefs as they relate to retention (Lavigne, 2010; Billingsley, 2007). This study, therefore, attempts to highlight

complexities that are not addressed in traditional studies of special education teacher retention and beliefs. Specifically, this study found ways in which the intersectional beliefs about disability, race, and culture held by five urban special education teachers influenced their overall attrition/retention decisions within the field and/or district.   This study shifted the focus to more intersectional approaches to understanding special education teacher retention.

Additionally this study complicated the story of why special education teachers tended to leave a large, urban district. Unlike traditional representations of "disgruntled leavers" illustrated by retention research, special education teacher participants of this study who decided to leave indicated that it was an incredibly difficult decision. All participants expressed dedication to their students, students' families and school communities which should not be undervalued. Furthermore, special education teachers' decisions to stay or leave were not easily correlated with whether they had critical views of disability, race, and culture. In fact, the two teachers who did remain in the district had some of the most opposing beliefs among the five participants.

This study came out of direct, personal experiences I had of being a special education teacher and then moving into graduate study in the field of special education. My own beliefs were shaped by those experiences much in the way that the participants of this dissertation study were shaped by their lived experiences as teachers and individuals supporting students with disabilities in the urban school district. While there was no guarantee, going into this study, that participants would choose to remain in special education, urban education, or even the field of education, all participants shared a deep commitment to education and educating youth. While none of the participants maintained a strong stance for remaining in the Rockport district, this was not for lack of heart. Indeed, all of the special education teacher participants of this study

had moments in which they were "risk takers" in their continued support of their students with disabilities from non-dominant backgrounds as well as the school communities within Rockport.

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Appendix A

Interview 1 Protocol (Background Information)

1. Can you tell me about how you got into the field of special education?

2. What kind of teacher education program did you go through before teaching, if any?

3. What courses/degrees did you have to obtain to teach here?

4. Is this the first school district you worked in out of your teacher education program or other school/work?

5. What made you decide to work in an urban school district?

6. Why did you decide to work with this particular population of students with disabilities?

7. What was your family/community's reaction to your decision to teach special education? Did anyone else in your family work with individuals with disabilities or have a disability themselves?

8. Did you have support/mentorship from other teachers before you got into teaching special education?

9. Tell me about your school, how did you decide to teach (elementary, middle, high school) special education there?

10. Have you ever worked in any other settings besides the one you work in currently?

Interview 2 Protocol (Beliefs about Disability, Beliefs about Culture/Race)

11. Talk about the field of special education, how do you feel about the overall system of providing services to students with disabilities?

12. Do you feel it is important to offer a continuum of services for students—different placements and types of services based on disability category?

13. Going along with the last question, how do you feel about disability labels?

14. Do you think it is important for students to be identified for special education? Why or why not?

15. Talk about your students and their futures, what kinds of outcomes do you hope for or expect from your students? How are you working towards making these futures a reality?

16. How do you perceive your students capabilities? Are there certain things you believe they can/cannot do?

17. How do you think your students are perceived by their peers based on their disability?

18. Talk about how it has been teaching students from cultural/linguistic backgrounds that are different from your own/similar to your own? What has been easy or difficult about this? How do you mitigate these differences/use these similarities to the benefit of your students?

19. What factors do you think influence your students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and their success in school?

20. Would you consider yourself a culturally responsive educator? In what ways do you see yourself using culture to support your students? If you do not, why do you choose not to?

Interview 3: Retention of Special Education Teachers

21. Have you ever thought about leaving special education and moving to general education? What keeps you from going to general education?

22. Have you ever thought about leaving teaching altogether for another career or life decision(s)? What deterred you from making this choice?

23. Have you previously switched special education teaching placements within Rockport?

24. If you changed positions from your original class assignment, why did you choose to do so? If not, why did you decide to stay in your original class assignment?

25. What sorts of beliefs or ideas about special education have made you want to continue teaching?

26. You've been teaching for ____years now, what are some things that motivate you to stay in this field? What are some frustrations you experience with special education?

Appendix B

Reflection Journal Prompts (*examples for first 4 prompts*)

Prompt 1: (3rd week in January)

List 2 personal beliefs or values that you believe you bring into the classroom with you? How do you think these beliefs or values have influenced your teaching so far this school year?

Prompt 2: (1st week in February)

Describe some of the instructional benefits and challenges you have faced so far this year working with students with disabilities. Pick one benefit and one challenge you mentioned and explain how they have shaped or changed what you believe your students can/cannot do.

Prompt 3: (3rd week in February)

Do you think there are behaviors or attitudes that are culturally specific to some of your students and their backgrounds? If so, please describe them. If not, describe why you don't think so.

Prompt 4: (1st week in March)

How are you feeling about this year so far (as compared to other years, if you've taught more than this year) in terms of being overwhelmed?

Prompt 5: (3rd week in March)

What are some things you've done this year to continue to persevere despite the challenges associated with teaching special education in an urban school district?

Prompt 6: (1st week in April)

As the year is starting to draw to a close, what are you thinking about doing next year? Will you continue to teach in your current placement? Why or why not?

Appendix C

Participant Consent Letter

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Research Participant Information and Consent Form

Title of the Study: How Beliefs Influence Special Education Teachers' Retention in an Urban School District

Principal Investigator: Cheryl Hanley Maxwell (phone: 608-262-9850, email: cheryl@education.wisc.edu);

Student Researcher: Saili Kulkarni (email: sskulkarni2@wisc.edu)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a research study about how beliefs regarding disability, race, and culture inform special educators' intent to continue teaching special education in an urban school district. You have been asked to participate because you have been identified as a participant who works in an urban district as a full-time special education teacher. This study will include about five, K-12 urban special education teachers who have had a variety of experiences in professional preparation and teaching.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you choose to participate, you will be interviewed a total of 3 times for approximately 1-1.5 hours per interview, for a total of 4.5 hours. The interviews will focus on general and specific questions about your beliefs about disability, race, and culture as they relate to your intent to remain in your school district. Your interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the student researcher. Once the accuracy of the transcript is verified, the audio file will be erased. You will also be asked to complete a series of journal prompts related to your intent to remain in the district, and your beliefs. Although the journal responses are intended to be short answers to questions, requiring no more than 15 minutes, the actual length of time depends on what you decide to write.

Only the principal investigator and the student researcher will have access to the audio files, transcriptions, and journal prompt responses. However, you will have access to your own transcript should you want to edit or clarify your responses, or include any additional information. You will also have access to the final analysis of your own materials.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

While every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality, there are three risks associated with this study. (1) Participants jobs could be affected if they disclose their intent to leave their special education teaching positions to the research team before the district has been notified. **However, the timing of this study is such that presentations and publications will not occur prior to a participant notifying the district of intent to leave. Additionally, the district will not be made aware of your participation in this study** (2) Participants will be sharing information of a sensitive nature, such as beliefs about race and disability, which may cause some distress. To mitigate distress, participants will have access to the information they provide. They can edit, delete, or add to that information as desired by the participant. Additionally, they may participate in the final analysis of data collected. These opportunities are intended to maximize participants' control over their data and how their data are presented. (3) Participants' reputations could be harmed if school administrators, colleagues, or community members knew participants' beliefs about race, disability, culture and their working environments. Additionally,

reputations of the schools, district, community, and students and families could be harmed if descriptions of events, interactions, etc. were specific enough to identify who and where related to these events. **Every effort will be made to mask the identity of the participants, their schools, their students and families, their district, and the community in which their school is located.**

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating. However, you will have unique opportunities to reflect on your practice through this study.

COMPENSATION

You will also receive the following incentives for your participation:
  a. $25 gift card to LakeShore Learning store
  b. $25 for coffee/tea at Peets Coffee
  c. Assistance with a donorschoose.org application for school supplies

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

While there will probably be publications and presentations as a result of this study, your name or other identifying information will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to participants, their schools, and district. As much as possible, descriptive information will be kept general. Additionally, the names of the schools, district, and state will be not be used in any publications or oral reports. Results will be reported in a way that minimizes the chances for identification, using only general examples and very brief quotes.

All original data sources will be destroyed once audio recordings are transcribed and documents are de-identified, coded, and scanned into a computer file. All data will be identified by pseudonym only and kept on a password protected laptop computer that has a 32-bit data encryption enabled. The key that links your identity to the data will be kept separately in the principal investigator's office. Once data analysis is complete, all files will be converted to hard copy and deleted from the computer. Hard copies of electronic materials and other documentation will be kept for a total of seven years in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will then be destroyed. Only the principle investigator and the student researcher will have access to the electronic or hard copy information.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you should contact the Principal Investigator, Cheryl Hanley Maxwell at 608-262-9850 (cheryl@education.wisc,.edu) or the student researcher, Saili Kulkarni (sskulkarni2@wisc.edu).

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. You will incur no penalty for your decision to not participate or to withdraw. You participation or nonparticipation will not be reported to anyone. Additionally, you will not be denied access to any future resources or opportunities that are under the control of the research team. If you choose to not participate or withdraw, all data collected about you will be destroyed. Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions

about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

We would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications or oral reports, please initial the statement below.

_____   I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications or presentations.

Appendix D

Codes Used During Data Analysis

a priori Codes (from literature)	*Emergent Codes*
Retention • School Community • Administrative Supports • Professional Development • Voluntary Transfers • Love of Students • Strong Teacher Education Programs	Retention • Desire to persevere • Work Life Balance/Ability to Cope • Supportive teacher ed cohort (for emergency licensure typically)
Attrition • Caseload • Paperwork • Paraprofessionals • Student Behaviors • Family Obligations • Preparation • Time/Prep Time • Involuntary transfers • Salary/Benefits	Attrition • Reinventing the Wheel • Credentialing Requirements • Politics • Personal Health • Previous Education of Students
Beliefs about Disability • Medical Model/Behaviorist • Constructivist • Emancipatory • Intersectional	Beliefs about Disability • Inclusivity • Pathologizing/Medical Model • Ability Deficit • Cognitive Issues • Advocacy • Special As Unique • Student Self Esteem
Beliefs about Race and Culture • Color Blindness • Culturally Deficit View • Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	Beliefs about Race and Culture • Social Justice-y

Conceptual Literature Map

Factors Related to Attrition and Retention in Special Education

Conceptual Literature Map

Beliefs about Students

Lavigne (2010)

Personal Factors

Previous Literature Reviews

Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley, 2003

Gender

Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener & Weber, 1997; Morvant & Gersten., 1995; Singer, 1992; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006

Age

Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener & Weber, 1997; Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Morvant & Gersten, 1995; Singer, 1992

Professional Factors

Support

Preparation and Qualifications

Environmental Factors

School Climate

[SPeNSE], 2002; Miller et al., 1999

Certification

Miller et al. (1999); Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener et al., 1997; Carlson & Billingsley, 2001

Salary

Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener et al. 1997; Miller et al. 1999; Singer, 1992; Carlson & Billingsley, 2001.

Race

Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener & Weber, 1997; Billingsley, 1996; Miller et al., 1999; Singer, 1992

Perceived Qualifications

George, George, Gersten, & Grosenick, 1995; Miller et al., 1999; Westling & Whitten, 1996; George et al., 1995; Brownell, Smith, McNellis, & Lenk, 1995; Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006

Administrative

Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener & Weber, 1997; Miller et al., 1999); George et al. (1995); Cross & Billingsley, 1994; Westling and Whitten (1996); Gersten et al. (2001); Billingsley, 1996; Singh & Billingsley, 1996; Gold, 1996

Appendix F

Packed Code Cloud

Appendix G

Proposed Model for Critical Special Education Teacher Education

Content Integration

Special education teachers use a variety of content which includes examples from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. Content is individually tailored/structured to meet the unique needs of students from all abilities. Content examines the intersections of different social markers within the educational context. Content honors and privileges the unique experiences and perspectives of individuals with disabilities.

Knowledge Construction

Special education teachers understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed within special education. Education is focused on a more comprehensive set of knowledge frameworks for special education.

Equity Pedagogy

Special education teachers learn to utilize instruction which facilitates the academic and social/emotional achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender, ability, and social class groups. Instruction focuses on a combination of research, theory and practices related to culturally relevant and responsive frameworks.

Critical Special Education Teacher Education

Prejudice Reduction

Special education teachers learn to reduce stigma related to learners of different abilities, experiences, and backgrounds within and outside of school contexts by acting as facilitators of professional development, university-school connections, and best practices. Focus within special education teacher education is on reducing deficit-based beliefs of communities of color and individuals of different abilities through thoughtful discussions, assignments, and reflective opportunities.

Empowering School Culture

Special education teachers learn specifically about grouping and labeling practices, disproportionality in achievement and special education. Special education teachers learn to work with school leadership, staff, families, and students as well as outside school agencies to foster a school and classroom culture which capitalizes on the values and strengths students bring to school. The focus for special education teachers is on practices that help develop critically conscious, self-determined students who work to better their individual lives and communities.

(Adapted from Banks & Banks, 2009)

Equity pedagogy. Equity pedagogy, like culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), suggests that teachers tailor their instruction to respond to individual learners' cultures, races, genders, and socioeconomic group groups (Banks & Banks, 2009). Within a critical special education teacher education framework, special education teachers learn to critique the mechanisms of traditional special education and practices. As Ware (2005) points out, tensions in schools of education and teacher education programs parallel those in the K-12 setting where many teachers are constrained by institutional structures and barriers that limit the alternative

constructions of special education. Such tensions are precisely why a critical special education framework is needed to guide special education teacher education.

As such, an equity pedagogy situated within special education teacher education would engage in deep learning about existing systems of oppression within the public school context and how to develop as a force of resistance against the mandates and institutional barriers. This includes, for example, supporting teachers in becoming activists and advocates within the larger school community.

Empowering classroom culture. Similar to Banks and Banks (2009), empowering classroom culture refers to an examination of discriminatory and marginalizing practices within the school context such as disproportionality, labeling and grouping, or segregating students by ability levels. When a teacher education program focuses on creating an empowering classroom culture, special education teachers learn to work with community leaders, administrators, families and the students themselves to capitalize on the values, assets, and strengths that students bring to school. This requires that special education teacher candidates are supported in moving away from working within deficit framings around differences related to disability, race, and culture. They are then encouraged to support the development of self-determined and critically conscious students who work to support their communities.

Duncan-Andrade (2005) mentions that such an empowering perspective of classroom culture and social justice "goes beyond the traditional narrative, which sees education as a vehicle for escaping financially impoverished communities" to instead see students as individuals who will "transform their urban communities" (p. 71). For teachers from a disability studies framework, Broderick et al., (2006) also underscored this point in their discussion of teachers who resist power structures and in turn lead their students to resist. Therefore, the

empowering classroom culture framework for special education teacher education would support special education teachers in creating this context for their students.

   Prejudice reduction. In the Banks and Banks (2009) model, students work closely with one another to reduce individual and group biases and engage in conversation about how to embrace differences rather than make generalizations or ignore them. Applying prejudice reduction to teacher education, candidates would be expected to participate in conversations in class that create tensions around race and culture, requiring them to learn about differences in deeper, more meaningful ways. Teacher education programs should also deliberately expose these candidates to opportunities to engage in reflections of how race and culture intersects with ability. Sleeter (1992) explains that educating teachers about race was and continues to be a challenging endeavor. Giving special education teachers opportunities to work out frustrations and tensions in a supportive, collective education program attempts to mitigate some of these challenges while acknowledging that the process of learning about intersectionality and reducing prejudices is complex.

   Knowledge construction. In Banks and Banks (2009) knowledge construction refers to helping students understand how deficit-based beliefs can be perpetuated within the school system, learning to be more critical of assumptions, and learning to take multiple perspectives. Helping future special education teachers critically examine knowledge construction can foster their ability to consider special education practices and structures using multiple lenses and frameworks, such as those presented by Rice (2006): positivist, interpretivist, and emancipatory. From this study, Rebecca's beliefs about certain students with disabilities needed to be placed in a particular setting based on positivist thinking about what setting is best for what kind of disability label or category. By contrast Nick's beliefs about his students with disabilities were

typically centered on his students' individual needs and then providing those supports within a

general education structure, which would parallel an interpretivist framework. Finally, Claudia's

beliefs about disability suggested that she pushed her students to succeed academically in general

education, as well as outside of school. In addition to the supports she provided in these various

settings, Claudia also helped her students lead IEPs and engage in self-determination. Special

education teachers would engage in readings, assignments, and activities that promote multiple

lenses and perspectives in special education.

Overall, a more critical framework with which to provide teacher education programs

within special education is needed. For in-service teachers, such a model of teacher education

also could hold promise for informing professional development and activities that support the

use of a broader set of beliefs related to disability, race and culture.