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BUILDING A CASE FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES USED WITH  
RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION MODELS TO REDUCE DISPROPORTIONATE  
REPRESENTATION AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

by  
Sonia Perry Barber

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Major: Leadership and Policy Studies

The University of Memphis

May 2019

## DEDICATION

I truly thank God for this accomplishment. This insurmountable feat shall not be taken for granted; and for its completion, I am truly grateful. My strength was in no way enough for this daunting task and without you oh heavenly father, I absolutely could not have completed this journey.

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required (Luke 12:48).

Rest in heaven, my dear Mother.

To my Dad: Thank you for encouraging me in your own special way.

Love, Soonie

## **ABSTRACT**

Barber, Sonia. Ed. D. The University of Memphis. My 2019. Building a case for culturally responsive practices to reduce disproportionate representation among African-Americans in special education. Major Professor: Reginald L. Green, Ph.D.

The federal law, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which was enacted to provide funds to states to support special education programs and to ensure that children and parents rights are protected, has been reauthorized several times. Yet, despite the multiple amendments to improve the law, there remains a disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. Such disparity creates a plethora of problems for African-American students. This study extends a previous case study in relation to using culturally responsive practices to reduce disproportionate representation among African Americans in special education. The purpose of this study is to determine the extent a Culturally Responsive approach to Response to Intervention may have decreased disproportionate representation among African Americans in special education in two school districts. The researcher used content analysis in order to develop a consensus on the knowledge and use of culturally responsive practices aligned with Response to Intervention models to decrease disproportionate representation in special education among African- American students in Florida and Virginia. The findings, implications, and recommendations for using culturally responsive practices with RTI models can reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education by using a theoretical framework as a guide for implementation. The results also suggested the need for continued research to improve how states define the criteria for determining disproportionate representation for all subgroups of students.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Special education describes services provided for students with disabilities and involves the process of identifying, assessing, and programming to address their specific learning needs through the use of researched-based strategies, interventions, and accommodations (Ball & Green, 2014). The ultimate goal of special education is to help students with disabilities access free, appropriate, and public education. Unlike their non-disabled peers, instruction for students with disabilities is guided by an individual educational program (IEP), which is a set of goals and objectives especially designed to meet their individual learning needs. Despite the well intentions of this educational process, research indicates that minority students are still referred and placed in special education at disproportionate rates (Herrera, 1998).

While disproportionality exists in the number of referrals and placements for minority students to special education programs, the disparity is even greater for African American students. Early federal data show that African American students make up 16% of total U.S. school enrollment, more than 38% of the all students classified with specific learning disabilities are of African American descent (Heller, Holtzman & Messick, 1982). This is especially significant given research indicates African American students enrolled in special education programs tend to have higher school dropout rates, unemployment rates, and incarceration rates (Proctor, Grave, & Esch, 2012). The net result is widening achievement gaps between African American students and their Caucasian peers.

An ongoing dialogue of closing the achievement gap continues to be at the forefront of school reform (Carey, 2014). Response to Intervention (RTI), a reform supported by both the No Child Left Behind Act of 2004 (NCLB, 2004) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA, 2004), is a tool to reduce disproportionality of minorities in



special education and thus, begin the closing of the achievement gap. However, with multiple reauthorizations of IDEA, African American students continue to be disproportionately represented in special education (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012).

This study expanded on a previous case study conducted by the researcher. Specifically, in the previous study, the researcher sought to examine the extent culturally responsive teaching reduced disproportionate representation of African American students referred and placed in special education. The previous study focused on the Pinellas County School District in Florida. Results of the study indicated some success in reducing disproportionate representation among African American students in special education with the implementation of culturally responsive practices combined with a response to intervention (RTI) model. Relative to culturally responsive practices, specifically, the researcher focused on instructional practices, which culturally supported students in a nurturing student-centered context and built upon the strengths students brought to school to promote student achievement (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). As for the RTI model, the researcher focused on effective approaches utilized to assist with early identification and support of students with learning needs.

To expand the earlier study, the researcher sought to explore an additional state for a school district, which had been identified as a district implementing culturally responsive practices aligned with a response to intervention model. After examining states incorporating culturally responsive practices with RTI models, Virginia was selected for qualitative review and content analysis for the current study.

### **Background of the Study**

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA). This was the first major law that required all public schools receiving federal funds to evaluate

mentally and physically disabled students and to provide them with an education on par with their non-disabled classmates (Smith, 2005). This was a significant accomplishment and has had a lasting impact on access to quality education for families of children with disabilities.

According to the document entitled *Twenty-Five Years of Progress in Educating Children with Disabilities through IDEA*, found on the U.S. Department of Education's website in the Data and Research section, only one in five children with disabilities were educated in 1970 in the U.S. and many states had laws, which excluded certain students, including children who were deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed, or mentally retarded (USDOE, 2019). Although this was significant progress from the 1960s, gross inequities toward minorities remained an issue (Skiba et al., 2006). Therefore, the need for additional reform and reauthorizations of the law, which governed education for students with disabilities, remained.

Each reauthorization of IDEA amended the act to improve the interventions available to students with disabilities (Smith, 2005). For example, the amendment made in 1983 included incentives for states to use in providing services to preschool children with disabilities. It also mandated states address transitioning from school to post-school, provide services for children, ages 3-5, and award legal fees in due process or court cases when parents prevailed (Smith, 2005). Additional changes in 1983 also included autism and traumatic brain injury as disability categories. In 1991, federal concern shifted to reform efforts to improve student educational outcomes of minorities with disabilities (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000).

In 1997, the law was amended, again, mandating the collection of data for the purposes of reducing disproportionality (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). However, this change did not appear to have a significant impact on the disproportionate rate of African American students referred and placed in special education (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Consequently, in 2001 IDEA

experienced another reauthorization and another in 2004. The reauthorization of 2004, also known as the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004), paved the way for the inclusion of the RTI model to be used in determining special education eligibility, added more specific language, and increased explicit monitoring procedures for disproportionate representation (Stecker, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008). Additionally, the passage of IDEIA 2004 substantially increased the amount of attention given to RTI as a service delivery model.

As demonstrated in the aforementioned passages, each reauthorization refined the requirements and principles that addressed approaches school districts could use in meeting the unique needs of students referred and placed in special education (Smith, 2005). However, for the purpose of this study, the mandates of IDEA 1997 and IDEIA 2004, which addressed the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education, were used to guide this qualitative review and content analysis relative to the implementation of RTI and culturally responsive teaching practices.

The RTI model is an alternative to the legacy ability-achievement discrepancy model when identifying specific learning disabilities. Specific learning disabilities, as identified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act website, Section 1401, Definitions Section 30 (A) is defined as the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or perform mathematical calculations. This multi-tiered system for all students, including those in general education and special education, requires ongoing progress monitoring, universal screening, intensive interventions based on the needs of students, and research-based, high-quality instruction and intervention (Bineham et al., 2014). The three tiers included in RTI are referred to as Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3.

In Tier 1, appropriate, high quality, grade level instruction is provided to all students in the general education setting (Proctor et al., 2012; Klingner & Edwards, 2012). In Tier 2, additional support is provided for students who do not appropriately respond to Tier 1 instruction. This placement involves small group instruction with daily interventions, which lasts a minimum of 8 to 15 weeks and requires bi-weekly progress monitoring (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). In Tier 3, more intensive support is provided. This placement requires weekly progress monitoring and increased interventions with instruction in specific skills. With the exception of severe cases, Tier 3 is typically the last tier before consideration of special education placement (Proctor et al., 2012). While Response to Intervention has become widely used, according to Proctor et al. (2012), the effectiveness of Response to Intervention is contingent upon timely and consistent implementation of the tiers to ensure the needs of students are met and whether or not initial efforts in meeting the needs of students are focused specifically on teaching and related to the culture of students.

The first studies relating to teaching and culture focused on incorporating students' cultural background, language interaction patterns that integrated cultural patterns at home, as well as student's cultural environment in the organization of the classroom (Au & Jordin, 1981; Mohatt & Erickson; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). In addition, other studies such as cultural appropriateness, conducted in smaller scale communities, indicated a cultural mismatch between language patterns of African American students and the schools in larger, urban settings (Ladson-Billings, 1997). This cultural mismatch discussed by Ladson-Billings (1997) is magnified in larger school settings; thus, resulting in increased social inequalities. However, the term culturally responsive, according to Ladson-Billings (1997), is viewed as "a more dynamic or synergistic relationship between home and community culture and school culture rather than

seeming to connote accommodation of student culture to mainstream culture” (p. 467). This is consistent with the work of Toppel (2015) who advocated the use culturally responsive education practices when providing instruction to meet the needs of minority students. Toppel (2015) argued culturally responsive education was to be regarded as a set of strategies including ideas, activities, and materials, which appealed to the cultural backgrounds of students, not a special designated week, highlighting holidays, traditional foods or clothing from various cultures.

A growing body of research suggests the success of African American students comes with costs (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Toppel, 2015). Specifically, Ladson-Billings (1997) found, “academic success came at the expense of [African American] cultural and psychosocial well-being” (p. 475). Additional findings from this research revealed a phenomenon of “acting White” resulting in African American students being ostracized by their peers. According to Ladson-Billings (1997), only about half of the African American high school students who are gifted in elementary schools continue to do well; and successful African American students are often considered “social isolates with neither African American nor White friends” (p. 475). As a result of being social isolates, these students stand apart from other African American students so that teachers do not attribute negative characteristics to them. This dilemma leads to African American students demonstrating cultural competency and meeting academic demands through a culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1997). However, the extent to which academic demands are met may be contingent upon values regarding cultural competence.

An example of valuing cultural competence includes a teacher incorporating rap lyrics to teach the elements of poetry before introducing conventional poetry. This approach reinforces and encourages students who are skilled in creating and improvising raps. Simultaneously, it re-channels peer group relationships by identifying strengths and abilities of students demonstrating

problem behaviors in a way that reinforces leadership abilities and taps into the use of language, positive peer interaction, and pride in self. With consistency and when centered on African American education, such approach is believed to develop students' cultural competence and increase academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1997).

In addition to teachers encouraging academic success and cultural competence within students, they must also utilize approaches to help students recognize, understand, and critique social inequities. Such approaches are embedded in culturally responsive practices and may be critical to the academic success of African American students. Thus, this study sought to identify model states incorporating culturally responsive practices with a response to intervention service delivery.

*Florida and Virginia: Model States.* This study expanded on a previous case study of Florida, as a model state, which had successfully incorporated culturally responsive practices with a response to intervention service delivery model to reduce disproportionate representation among African-American students referred and placed in special education. The Blueprint for Tier 3 implementation (2014) document designed to support meeting the individualized needs of students in a multitiered system of support detailed the transition process for the RTI model name change to a Multitiered System of Support (MTSS) RTI/MTSS in 2014. Additional terms such as Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) were also included as a data-based problem-solving initiative used within the state of Florida. Since the original study included a school district from a member state of the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB), this study also included a school district from the SREB state of Virginia, another state known for implementing culturally responsive practices with a response to intervention service delivery model.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Research suggests RTI has the potential to reduce disproportionality in special education among culturally and linguistically diverse students. However, this does not change the data that show African Americans may still be overrepresented in special education (Proctor et al., 2012). Meanwhile, a culturally responsive approach to intervention and instruction is gaining popular acceptance among policymakers, practitioners, and parents. Such an approach has not yet been systematically examined for effectiveness in reducing disproportionality among African American students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was three-fold:

- To identify the culturally responsive practices used with RTI models to reduce disproportionality among African Americans in special education in Pinellas County Schools in FL and Arlington Public Schools in VA.
- To identify the shared practices between the two school districts.
- To determine the relevant factors used to determine disproportionate representation.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The federal law, IDEA, which was enacted to provide funds to states to support special education programs and to ensure the protection of rights for parents and children with disabilities, has been reauthorized several times. Yet, despite the multiple amendments to improve the law, there remains a disproportionate representation of minority students in special education. Such disparity creates a plethora of problems for African American students. For example, African American students who are misplaced or misrepresented are more likely to suffer from low morale, low self-esteem, academic disengagement, increased misbehavior, and truancy. In recognition of the ongoing problem of disproportionate representation of minority

groups, the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA incorporated a response to intervention<sup>1</sup> as another model to effectively determine special education eligibility. Although this multi-tiered system of support was intended to provide struggling students with support before special education placement, African American students may still be referred, identified, and placed in special education at disproportionate rates (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Therefore, this study examined a new approach to special education provision; a culturally responsive framework with a response to intervention model intended to reduce disproportionate representation among African Americans in special education.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided this research study:

1. What are the culturally responsive practices used with RTI frameworks to reduce disproportionality in Pinellas County Schools in Florida and Arlington Public Schools in Virginia?
2. What are the shared practices in the components of the Culturally Responsive RTI framework between the two school districts?
3. In measuring disproportionality, what relevant factors are considered in determining if significant disproportionality is occurring in the states of Florida and Virginia?

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this research addressed the need for focusing on African American special education referrals and placements, which have not proven effective for these students.

Over the past 40 years, Congress has passed mandates, including efforts to reduce

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<sup>1</sup> RTI is a multitier framework utilized by schools for early identification of learning difficulties or diagnosis of specific LD. This framework consists of a universal screening, high-quality instruction with increasingly intense research-based interventions, continuous monitoring of student performance and occurs prior to a determination of need for special education support and services (Bineham, Shelby, Pazez & Yates, 2014, pg.238).



disproportionate representation. However, with each amendment, the number of African American students referred and placed in special education has remained disproportionate (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Proctor, et al., 2012; Skiba et al., 2008; Klinger et al., 2005). A large body of research reveals inequities among demographics that contribute to ongoing dialogue of an achievement gap and racial disparity (Carey, 2014; Skiba et al., 2008; Klinger et al., 2005).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Skiba et al. (2006) contend “using data from a single state allows more intensive focus on variables of interest than a national study” (p. 421). For example, while data from Florida were not unique in showing evidence of disproportionality, an annual report published by the Office of Special Education Programs (2002) continued to show evidence of widespread minority disproportionality Skiba et al. (2006). As explained by Skiba et al. (2006), researchers cannot assume the current results for special education referrals and placements generalize to other states, as factors, which may impact the patterns of and reasons for disproportionality, vary considerably from state to state. Lastly, this study consisted of a policy review, only. It did not include actual classroom observations.

### **Assumptions**

The assumption, which guided this study, was that a culturally responsive framework combined with a response to intervention model would reduce disproportionality of African American students in special education.

## Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms and definitions were used:

- 1) *Cultural Competence*. The attainment of attitudes, skills, knowledge, and behaviors that enable staff and students to develop positive relationships and work effectively in cross cultural situations (Gay, 2010).
- 2) *Culturally Relevant Teaching*. A model, which includes teaching practices that address student achievement by helping students accept and affirm their cultural identity and develop critical perspectives that challenge inequities (Ladson-Billings, 1997).
- 3) *Culturally Responsive Teaching*. A teaching approach, which utilizes cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to expand learning and make learning more relevant, engaging, and effective. Culturally Responsive Teaching is characterized by a set of congruent behaviors that recognize the importance of including cultural references in all aspects of learning. Some of the behaviors include: 1) seeing teaching as an art; 2) believing that all of their students can succeed; 3) seeing themselves as a part of a community, including students, families, the city, the world; 4) helping students make connections with all parts of the community; 5) having varied social interactions with students; 6) encouraging student connectedness and collaborative learning; 7) seeing knowledge as being continuously created and shared; 8) being passionate about their subject; 9) building bridges; and 10) scaffolding for learning that builds whatever knowledge and skills a child needs to succeed (Gay, 2010).

- 4) *Culturally Responsive Practices*. A set of instructional practices, which culturally support students in a student-centered context as well as nurture and build upon the strengths students bring to school to promote student achievement (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007).
- 5) *Composite Index (CI)*. The CI represents the extent to which a group is misrepresented in a category compared to its proportion in the broader population (Skiba et al., 2006).
- 6) *Disproportionality*. Representation of a group in a category, which exceeds our expectations for that group, or differs substantially from the representation of others in that category (Skiba et al., 2006).
- 7) *Focus School*. A focus school is one that has room for improvement relative to the disproportionate representation of African American students in special education (NJDOE, 2019).
- 8) *Priority School*. A Priority school is one that has been identified among the lowest-performing five percent of Title I schools in the state over the past three years, or any non-Title I school that would otherwise have met the same criteria (NJDOE, 2019).
- 9) *Response to Intervention (RTI)*. The Response to Intervention (RTI) model is an alternative to the legacy ability-achievement discrepancy model. Its multi-tiered system for all students, including those in general education and special education, requires ongoing progress monitoring, universal screening, intensive interventions based on the needs of students, and research-based high-quality instruction and intervention (Bineham et al., 2014).

- 10) *Risk Ratio*. A ratio, which describes the extent to which a group is found eligible for service at a rate differing from that of other groups (Skiba et al., 2006).
- 11) *Special Education*. Special education describes services provided for students with disabilities and involves the process of identifying, assessing, and programming to address their specific learning needs through the use of researched-based strategies, interventions, and accommodations (Ball & Green, 2014). Relative to educating students with disabilities, special education is the most intensive intervention along the continuum of service defined by individual need, services, and placement (TDOE, 2019).

### **Organization of the Study**

The study was organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the introduction, background, and purpose of the study. The problem statement, specific research questions, significance of the study, the limitations of the study, and the definition of terms are also included in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 contains an extensive review of related literature and is divided into five major areas: 1) a historical perspective of disproportionality and its significance; 2) a review of special education legislation; 3) a theoretical and conceptual framework; 4) RTI as a model; and 5) a review of the model state. Chapter 3 includes the research methodology for this study. Chapter 4 includes the results of analyses, disseminates the results of the qualitative review and content analyses, and addresses the research questions. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and conclusions and discusses implications of the study along with potential areas for future research. Suggestions for future research, along with potential implications to educational settings are also noted in Chapter 5.

## **Summary**

Chapter 1 introduced the study and provided background information related to special education laws and the use RTI and culturally responsive practices to address disproportionate referrals and placements of African American students in special education. Chapter 1 also provided the purpose of the study, problem statement, specific research questions, significance of the study, limitations of the study, and definition of terms to be used throughout the study. To date, there are still many unanswered questions about RTI and culturally responsive teaching practices. As RTI continues to take center stage as a framework for considering equitable and consistent positive outcomes for all students, attention to these structural and cultural challenges is paramount. An increase in research incorporating culturally responsive practices yields promise in effective measures to use to reduce disproportionality in special education among African American students. It is the researchers hope this study will extend the knowledge, understanding, and implementation of the critical need to integrate culturally responsive practices in diverse school settings. In Chapter 2, a review of the literature regarding culturally responsive practices, background of disproportionate representation and the history of referrals and placement of African American students in special education is presented.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

To determine the effects of a culturally responsive-response to intervention to reduce disproportionate representation, this study relied heavily on a body of literature that was pertinent to analyzing the effects of culturally responsive practices used with a response to intervention model and the impact on African American students referred and placed in special education. A historical background of the problem is presented in the introduction. The major underpinnings in the literature review included: 1) a historical synopsis of special education beliefs and purposes; 2) a historical perspective of the problem; and 3) background to determining disproportionate representation. Additional underpinnings in the development of a culturally responsive framework included: 1) an examination of the purposes of RTI; 2) an alignment of culturally responsive practices with a theoretical framework for change; and 3) the development and purpose of the constructs of a culturally responsive framework. The final underpinning provides the research context of the model state, Florida, as a review and an expansion of a previous case investigating disproportionate representation among African American students in special education in the state of Florida.

#### **Historical Perspective of the Problem**

The role and purpose of special education programs has evolved over the years. Early special education programs were either, private or residential. Further, they varied between states and initially, were not available for students with disabilities (Wright, 2010). As explained by Wright (2010), in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the primary focus was on students who were considered at risk and living in urban slums. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century ended, advocacy for individuals with disabilities increased and the focus shifted to include support for those classified as deaf,

blind, and mentally retarded. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, special education programs began to evolve to include focus on identifying students having specific learning disabilities. Since then, the challenges have been how to appropriately refer and identify students who truly need additional support and how to differentiate these students from those who may be subjected to cultural biases and other barriers to learning. While new research in disproportionality in special education programs starting to focus on the disproportionality of English Language Learners (ELLs), minorities and students of color have long been overrepresented in these targeted programs. More specifically, the persistence of this issue with African American students remains a concern (Wright, 2010).

Throughout the history of the U.S., African American students have suffered from systemic low expectations. Skiba et al. (2008) research credited Rury (2002) with adding the root cause as to systemic low expectations in that, “from Reconstruction until the 1950s, the dominant view of African American education was that it was intended not to educate for equal citizenship, but rather for the lower ranked positions that it was assumed African Americans would occupy” (p. 265). Additional research included that inequality toward African American students has deep-rooted connections that existed long before the 1896 court case of Plessy vs. Ferguson when it was determined that separate, but equal school facilities were acceptable under the law (Skiba et al., 2008). According to Skiba et al. (2008), Jim Crow laws enforced inequality as well as segregation. As a result of these harsh laws, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, race riots emerged. Additionally, there was an emergence of attacks on African Americans, their communities, and schools designated for their children (Skiba et al., 2008). Moreover, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the American eugenics movement organized, maintaining individuals other than northern European stock were intellectually inferior and ineffectual. Within this historical

context of bias and discrimination, African American children continued to struggle, academically. Thus, widening the achievement gap between them and their Caucasian counterparts.

*Special Education Legislation.* With the long history of inequity toward blacks, researchers such as Dunn (1968) raised significant civil rights and educational concerns regarding the overrepresentation of minorities in self-contained classrooms. Studies found that public schools used the mentally retarded category more than any other (Skiba et al., 2008). These early efforts of documenting racially biased disparities, despite the laws in place, were evidence that discrimination remained embedded in our consciousness, actions and institutions (Skiba et al., 2008). Additionally, during the wake of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, isolation practices such as ability grouping and separate special education classrooms, continued to segregate by race (Losen & Welner, 2001). Furthermore, continued and ongoing challenges were being referred to the court for violations under the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution and the Title VI of the Civil Rights Act 164, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Education for All Handicapped Children of 1975. This led to an increase in research efforts during the 1970s and 1980s (Skiba et al., 2008). Subsequently, the research revealed inequities among demographics that contributed to ongoing dialogue of an achievement gap and racial disparity (Carey, 2014; Skiba et al., 2008).

Over the past 40 years, mandates have passed in efforts to reduce disproportionate representation. However, with each change the number of African American students referred and placed in special education has remained at disproportionate rates (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Proctor, et al., 2012; Skiba et al., 2008). Originally known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-194, was passed in 1975 (Smith, 2005). This federal



legislation officially funded special education programs designed to educate students with disabilities (Smith, 2005). Each reauthorization modified the requirements and principles that addressed approaches school districts should use in meeting the unique needs of students assigned to special education (Smith, 2005). In the 1980s, the extent and the distribution of disproportionality began to surface from United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights survey data (Skiba et al., 2008). As a result, policy pressure continued to focus on effective ways to reduce disproportionality in special education, federal attention heightened, and multiple reauthorizations of IDEA were passed.

*Reauthorizations of IDEA 1997 and 2004.* According to Smith (2005), IDEA (2004) was a major attempt to focus on eliminating disproportionate overrepresentation of groups in special education programs. Credited with changing the lives of students with disabilities, IDEA (1997) granted students with learning disabilities access to the general curriculum and required them to participate in state and district assessments (Smith, 2005). Under this reauthorization, students with learning disabilities received an individualized education plan, designed to meet their instructional needs, and were placed in the least restrictive environment. As mandated by law, the least restrictive environment component of IDEA (1997) required students with disabilities to be educated, to the maximum extent appropriate, with their nondisabled peers and with supplemental aids and services (Smith, 2005). IDEA (1997) also shifted the priority from academics to quality and provided for early intervening services, preschool, and special education services.

According to Skiba & Albrecht, (2013), African American special education placements were still at least twice as higher than White counterparts with the reauthorization of IDEA (1997) Skiba et al. (2006). The significance of this federal mandate for this qualitative content

analysis confirmed the need for the mandate to have local education agencies monitor and report disproportionality data based on race with respect to: 1) the identification of children with disabilities, including the identification of children with disabilities in accordance with a particular impairment; and 2) the placement in particular educational settings of such children. Although the performance of many school districts improved under IDEA (1997), the law had limited ability to help states address the critical steps, procedures, and practices needed to reduce disproportionality (Skiba & Albrecht, 2013). This paved the way for additional improvements within the law (Skiba & Albrecht, 2013).

To further improve identification and services for students with disabilities, congress reauthorized IDEA, again. With this reauthorization, IDEA was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA). This particular reauthorization identified additional eligibility criteria for special education placement and reinforced existing safe guards for reducing racial disproportionality in special education (Skiba & Albrecht, 2013). As a result of this reauthorization, states were to consider whether an individual student's response to scientific, research-based intervention (RTI) determined a specific learning disability (Proctor, et al., 2012).

IDEIA (2004) sustained three notable improvements over the earlier version of the law: 1) special education disproportionality was a priority area for monitoring and enforcement; 2) focus was shifted from special education noncompliance to prevention in the general education setting; and 3) interventions were mandated and 15% of IDEA funding allocations were to be repurposed when racial disproportionality was significant in the identification, placement, or discipline of students with disabilities (Skiba & Albrecht, 2013). Skiba and Albrecht (2013) credited Williams (2007) further explained noted with these changes, early intervening services

were distinguished as services for infants and toddlers with disabilities in that they identified and targeted children who were experiencing learning difficulty and intervened quickly to provide them with support. As a result, IDEIA (2004) was the foundation for RTI to be included as another model in determining a specific learning disability.

RTI began its efforts as a general education initiative and removed the requirement of having a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability to determine special education eligibility. Although the idea of using RTI as the method for identifying the presence of a learning disability was nothing new, researchers and practitioners refined the primary method for identification of learning disabilities. However, guidelines for RTI did not address the necessity of collaboration between general and special education (Bineham, Shelby, Pazey, & Yates, 2014).

RTI was reintroduced to the educational mainstream in 2004 with the reauthorization of IDEA (Bineham et al., 2014). In an earlier study discussed by Bineham et al. (2014), Heller, Holtzman, and Messick (1982) provided the first recommendation on using RTI procedures for struggling students. The primary aim of the 2004 amended act was to establish national standards for the free appropriate public education of children with disability-related learning problems in the least restrictive environment (Bineham et al., 2014). The addition of the RTI model to IDEA brought about consideration of relevant factors, which may have contributed to the disproportionate representation of African American students referred and placed in special education.

*Background of Determining Disproportionate Representation.* The definition of significant disproportionality is not defined in IDEIA (2004), which leads to additional problems with disproportionality at the federal and state level (Albrecht et al., 2012; Skiba & Albrecht,

2013). Discretion is left to states to develop the quantifiable indicators of disproportionality used for determining significance. No criteria for defining significant disproportionality continues to perpetuate confusion by failing to provide guidance to those at the state and local level who may be unfamiliar with statistical analysis (Albrecht et al., 2012; Skiba & Albrecht, 2013).

The Bush administration was noted for having caused controversy with the interpretation of IDEIA (2004). This inconsistency of interpretations resulted in disproportionate representation and significant disproportionality emerging as different terms (Albrecht et al., 2012; Skiba & Albrecht, 2013). Subsequently, in 2010, the U. S. Department of Education, Secretary of Education, Dunn, spoke in favor of strengthening civil rights in education. Ironically, despite the policies, research, and court challenges, racial disproportionality continued to be an unresolved problem in the education field, which contributed to the achievement gap (Skiba & Albrecht, 2013; Skiba et al., 2008).

Findings from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) showed that reading and math gaps were substantial for African American students. African American males showed the greatest disparities (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). Additionally, data from the 2011 NAEP report revealed that of the 34% of fourth graders reading at or above proficiency level, only 11% of student with disabilities and 17% of Black students scored proficient (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). These issues were not only limited to disparities in academic performance, they also included confusion caused by inconsistent use of terminology at the federal and state level (Skiba et al., 2013).

Without a concrete definition of significant disproportionality and disproportionate representation, the Office of Special Education and Programs and Westat convened a national panel to discuss practices for monitoring disproportionality (Skiba et al., 2008). As a result of

this collaboration, the following practices were adopted: 1) the establishment of risk ratios to be used to measure disproportionality; 2) the establishment of a set of instructions for calculating disproportionality; and 3) the establishment of an alternative weighted RR for 10 students or less in a target group in a school district or comparing risk ratios across districts (Skiba et al., 2008). Skiba et al. (2008) reasoned that in measuring disproportionality, the following should be also assessed: 1) composition index, which measures over or under representation in a category compared to its broader population; and 2) risk index and risk ratio, which provide demographic data across groups on the number eligible for services.

Skiba et al. (2008) defined disproportionality as “the representation of a group in a category that exceeds our expectations for that group, or differs substantially from the representation of others in that category” (p. 9). In the aforementioned research, disproportionality has focused on overrepresentation, but data have also shown that groups may be underrepresented in categories or settings (e.g. underrepresentation in general education settings, gifted education, or visual impairment) (Skiba et al., 2008). For the purpose of this research, disproportionality will focus on the overrepresentation of African American students referred and placed in special education.

Risk index and risk ratio can be used to describe disproportionality as a measure of a group’s representation in special education when compared to other groups (Skiba et al., 2008). Risk index is the proportion of a given group that represents the best estimate of risk for that group. To interpret risk index, construct a ratio of the target group to one or more groups; thus, a risk ratio is established (Hosp & Reschly, 2003). A ratio of 1.0 indicates exact proportionality and ratios above 1.0 indicates overrepresentation. A ratio below 1.0 indicates underrepresentation. Skiba et al. (2008) cautioned that racial disparities might provide

incomplete pictures regarding disproportionality. Thus, additional statistical data should be used in calculating statistical data, including risk ratio, composite index and chi squared statistics.

Research conducted by Skiba et al. (2008) showed that composition index could be viewed as comparing “the proportion of those served in special education represented by a given ethnic group with the proportion that group represents in the population or in school enrollment” (p. 10). The composition index was calculated by dividing the number of students in a given racial or ethnic group placed in a particular disability category by the total number of students enrolled in that disability category. The risk index was calculated by dividing the number of students in a given racial or ethnic group placed in a particular disability category by the total enrollment for that racial or ethnic group in the school population. The risk ratio was calculated by dividing the risk index of one racial or ethnic group by the risk index of another racial or ethnic group (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The concern with the composition index was there was no criterion that determined meaningful or significant (Coutinho & Oswald, 2004). A final concern with composition index was the usefulness diminished with homogenous groups (Skiba et al., 2008).

Lastly, another method of determining disproportionate representation discussed by Skiba et al. (2006) included the use of a chi squared statistic. A chi squared statistic was used in a study conducted by Skiba et al. (2006) to determine the extent of disproportionate representation of African American students that occurred in more or least restrictive educational environment and if placements were deemed appropriate. This study revealed state level aggregation, which indicated an overrepresentation of African American students in multiple categories, emotionally disturbed (RRR= 2.36), mild mental retardation (RRR= 3.29), moderate mental retardation (RRR= 1.91), and approximately proportionally represented in specific learning disability

(RRR= .94). This study revealed African American students were underrepresented in general education classroom settings (RRR = .71) and overrepresented in more restrictive placement settings (RRR= 2.94). Additional research showed similar findings of the negative effects of disproportionate representation of African American students. Continuous negative effects of disproportionate representation revealed exclusionary patterns for students with disabilities in a study presented by Bowman and colleagues (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014). According to Simmons-Reed and Cartledge (2014), Students in the following categories were at the greatest risk: 1) emotional behavioral disorders; 2) attention deficit hyperactive disorder; and 3) specific learning disabilities.

Carey (2014) expressed there were two primary lenses through which to consider the achievement gap, race-based gaps, and gaps along socioeconomic lines. The race-based achievement gap primarily refers to the disparities in educational outcomes existing between African Americans, Latinos, certain Asian subgroups, including Vietnamese, Filipino, Laotian, Cambodian, Thai, Samoan, Native Americans, and their White counterparts (Carey, 2014). According to Reardon (2011), socioeconomic achievement gaps tied to race-based achievement gaps are crucial to understand. In addition, Carey (2014) discussed that Rothstein (2004) identified the following critical elements to explain why many students from lower income families underperform in schools in comparison with students from middle and higher-income families: 1) the limited access to out-of-school experiences; 2) limited access to health care; 3) uncertain housing security; and 4) limited economic stability.

In an expansion on Rothstein's (2004) study, Carey (2014) discussed various sources of evidence to support the socioeconomic achievement gap such as lower standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, college enrollment, retention, and completion rates. Cary's (2014)

research also discussed that such disparate outcomes have been documented to have long-term effects for students relative to obtaining college degrees, career placement, financial stability, and subsequently, life trajectories. Due to this ongoing concern of the achievement gap, changes, and mandates in federal laws regarding racial and ethnic disproportionality issues dating back to 1973 with the Rehabilitation Act and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) have been enacted.

*Background of Response to Intervention.* RTI was reintroduced to the educational mainstream in 2004 with the reauthorization of IDEA. The primary aim of the 2004 amended act was to establish national standards for the free appropriate public education of children with disability-related learning problems in the least restrictive environment. The addition of the Response to Intervention determination model to IDEA brought the consideration of relevant factors, which may have contributed to the overrepresentation of African American students in special education (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007).

The passage of IDEIA 2004 substantially increased the amount of attention given to RTI as a service delivery model for all students. While The U.S. Department of Education did not subscribe to a particular RTI framework, it implicated the following four essential components that underpinned all RTI models: 1) school-wide, multi-tiers of instruction, which became progressively more intense, based on the students' response to instruction; 2) screening of all students for academic and behavioral problems; 3) progress monitoring of student performance; and 4) quality research-based instruction for students with disabilities in the general education setting (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs et al., 2003). However, guidelines for RTI did not address the necessity of collaboration between general and special education (Bineham, Shelby, Pazey & Yates, 2014).



Prior to 2004, students were often identified as having a learning disability if there was a large discrepancy between the student's academic performance and potential. This concept is known in education circles as the traditional ability-achievement discrepancy approach (Vaughn et al., 2003). However, the process with RTI included using a multi-tiered system, which incorporated universal screening, grade-level instruction, interventions and progress monitoring before referral and identification (Bineham et al., 2014).

Bineham et al. (2014) defined RTI as a multi-tiered system for all students, general and special education. This system includes ongoing progress monitoring, universal screening, intensive interventions based on student needs and researched based, high-quality instruction and intervention. High quality grade-level instruction occurs at Tier 1 (Proctor et al., 2012; Klingler & Edwards, 2012). When students are not appropriately responding to Tier 1 instruction, they are placed in Tier 2 (Stecker, Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008). Tier 2 placements last a minimum of 8 to 15 weeks and include progress monitoring for students (Stecker et al., 2008). Progress monitoring for Tier 2 students occurs bi-weekly with daily and additional academic support (Proctor et al., 2012). Tier 3 requires the teacher to provide weekly progress monitoring and increased interventions when students continue to show a lack of progress. Tier 3 is the last placement before special education placement is considered with the exception of severe cases (Proctor et al., 2012).

Research conducted by Proctor et al. (2012) suggested the promise of RTI could reduce disproportionality among culturally and linguistically diverse students, but African Americans, in particular, may still be overrepresented in special education. As a result, this study will seek to determine if culturally responsive practices used with RTI models can reduce disproportionate

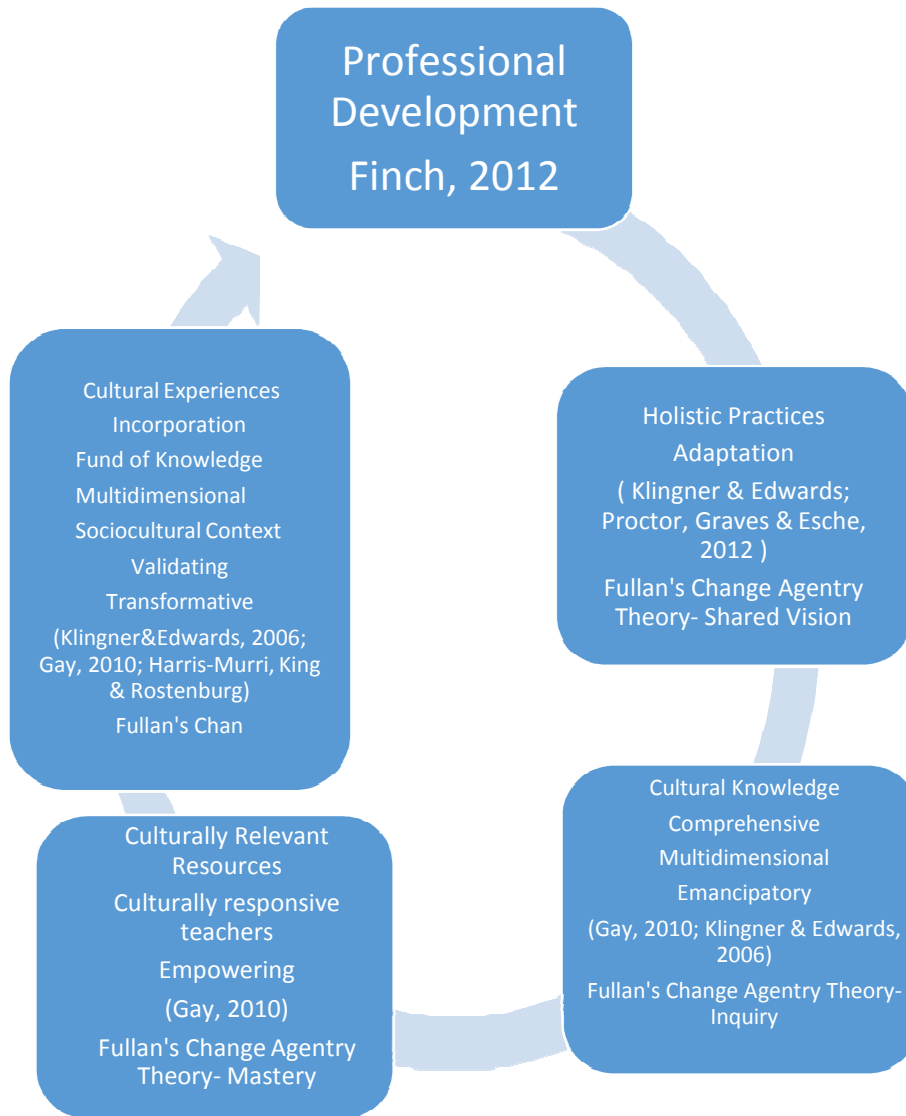
representation by incorporating and aligning a change agency theoretical framework with culturally responsive practices.

### **Fullan's Change Agency Theoretical Framework**

Fullan's work regarding the Change Agency Theory encapsulates four elements embedded in culturally responsive practices (Green, 2013). Green (2013) referenced Fullan's work, which detailed the pathways organizations may implement when building the capacity for change. The four core capacities referenced included: 1) the building of a personal vision; 2) inquiry; 3) mastery; and 4) collaboration.

In building capacity for change, Green (2013) contends a shared vision must first be established and supported by building a community of learners who are vested personally in the organizational change process. Once individuals are in support of the change, inquiry, which includes monitoring continuously for feedback to ensure vision alignment, ongoing learning in the community, and refinement of practices must be conducted. This provides the rationale for change and further establishes the organizational support, which is required for mastery. As support increases, individual self-reflection, and acceptance of novel approaches to impact the organization positively become a part of the organization's norms and mastery is achieved. Relative to school organizations, at this juncture in the change process, relationships among external and internal stakeholders must be established to foster collaboration and cross-institutional partnerships, which consists of school districts, universities, and school communities. According to Green (2013) when the capacities proposed by Fullan are implemented in a manner similar to the aforementioned illustration, capacity for change is maximized and the formation of sustainable learning communities, which increase the probability of positive change, is more likely to occur.

The theoretical framework of the Change Agency Theory embodies the principles of culturally responsive practices. Thus, it was selected to guide this specific study. In an effort to align the study to the Change Agency theory, holistic procedures, processes, and practices needed for a culturally response-responsive framework were presented.



**Figure 1. Theoretical Framework: Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Practices (CRP) aligned with the literature**

Table 1. Constructs of Culturally Responsive Pedagogical Practices

<b>Constructs of CRP</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
<b>Cultural Experiences</b>	<b>Value “funds of knowledge” to build a repertoire of understanding student experiences</b>
<b>Cultural Knowledge</b>	<b>Value cultural experiences that bridge the gap between home and school relationships and aligning via content, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, classroom management and assessment</b>
<b>Holistic Practices</b>	<b>Tap into prior experiences based on cultural experiences</b>
<b>Culturally Relevant Resources</b>	<b>Ethos of providing the necessary resources that impact student learning to become productive citizens</b>
<b>Professional Development</b>	<b>Targeted PD for teachers that meet the needs of individuals</b>

*Source:* Adapted from Gay, 2010; Proctor, Graves & Esch, 2012; Finch, 2012

## **Background of Culturally Responsive Teaching**

During the 20th century, several researchers promoted school reform that addressed disproportionate representation among minorities. Such reform efforts led to the use of culturally responsive practices to close the achievement gap and improve academic outcomes for students of color (Skiba & Albrecht 2013). Culturally responsive school reform supported the belief that there was a need for race-education processes, procedures, and practices that address the ongoing concern of disproportionate representation in special education (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Skiba & Albrecht 2013). Adding support, Toppel (2015) found great inspiration in the expertise of Gay (2010), which discovered that many of the culturally responsive practices could be addressed while using a core reading program.

Gay (2010) defined culturally responsive teaching as the ability to “use cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference to make learning relevant and effective for diverse students” (p. 31). Gay (2010) further postulated, this style of teaching included characteristics that were consistent with other teaching approaches. Richard, Brown, and Forde (2007) defined culturally responsive practices as a set of instructional practices, which culturally support students in a student-centered context and nurture and build upon the strengths students bring to school to promote student achievement. However, the focus of culturally responsive teaching practices and research is to make classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students and how to use these practices to improve academic performance for these students.

The preferred term, culturally responsive pedagogy, was used and substituted when other scholars used different terminology (Gay, 2010). Experts in the field identified and described the

attitudes, beliefs, processes, procedures, and practices needed for implementing culturally responsive teaching when working with students of color (Klingner & Edwards, 2012; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Proctor et al., 2012; Toppel, 2015).

*Culturally Responsive Framework.* Specific attitudes, beliefs, processes, procedures, and practices were categorized into specific constructs (Gay, 2010, Klingner & Edwards, 2006, Harris et al., 2006). Experts in the culturally responsive pedagogy field provided the pathway to develop the major categories, themes, and definitions in the framework (Gay, 2010, Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Harris et al., 2006; Pilhofer, 2011). The constructs were identified as cultural experience, cultural knowledge, holistic practices, culturally relevant resources, and professional development. Each construct is discussed further to provide understanding of the elements and specific practices to be used with students (Gay, 2010; Finch, 2012). Current research supported many of these constructs, which promulgated this study as a full embodied, holistic framework (Klingner & Edwards, 2012; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Proctor et al., 2012; Toppel, 2015).

*Descriptors.* Descriptors were also aligned with each construct to provide further understanding of the elements needed to fully implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices with RTI models to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education. The research provided a complexity of research. To be included as a descriptor in this study confirmed the complexity of the practices that are desired for the construct. The descriptors of culturally responsive teaching were validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, and emancipatory (Gay, 2010). Some descriptors slightly overlapped constructs within the framework. The researcher designed a culturally responsive pedagogical framework to capture the complexities in the elements needed

to effectively implement culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Furthermore, this framework included the necessary descriptors selected to determine if culturally responsive pedagogical practices aligned with RTI models reduced disproportionate representation among African Americans in special education (Klinger & Edwards, 2012; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Proctor et al., 2012; Toppel, 2015).

*Cultural Experience Construct.* The concept, funds of knowledge, refers to the knowledge students acquire from their family and cultural backgrounds (Gay, 2010; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Valuing funds of knowledge is believed to help teachers to understand how his or her personal culture functions in education influence their practices (Ladson-Billing, 1997). Cultural experiences were described as valuing funds of knowledge to understand student experiences (Gay, 2010). Ladson-Billings (1997) also suggested funds of knowledge is a cultural approach, which utilizes student experiences to support classroom learning. Adding support, Garcia and Ortiz (2006) agreed, suggesting, “culturally and linguistically diverse learners were better served by curricula and instruction that build on socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge and experiences” (p. 6). Therefore, a major underpinning of moving toward a theory of culturally responsive pedagogy is valuing funds of knowledge.

Lastly, studies showed that this construct also aligned with culturally responsive caring as discussed by Toppel (2015) and Gay (2010). Culturally responsive caring involved teachers accepting the challenge of understanding multiple perspectives of a diverse population of students whose experiences differ greatly from their own (Toppel, 2015). Cultural experiences segued into the cultural knowledge construct, which taught students of color how to increase appreciation, knowledge, and understanding about his or her own heritage and others as well (Gay, 2010).



The cultural experience construct included practices that found value in the funds of knowledge concept (Gay, 2010). Gay (2010) discussed previous studies on schools using funds of knowledge, which is directly aligned with culturally responsive teaching. This practice enabled teachers to teach students how to honor cultural heritages of other ethnic groups. Additionally, by using this practice, teachers also meaningfully connected home and school experiences with academics and the real world, which served as a bridge for communication between teachers and parents. Gay (2010) credited J. Banks with naming transformative as the final descriptor under the construct of cultural experiences. For the purpose of this research, transformative is described as the process where students become social critics who are able to make reflective decisions while combating prejudices, racism, and other forms of oppression (Gay, 2010).

*Cultural Knowledge Construct.* According to Hughes-Hassell and Stivers (2015), “Numerous studies have shown that youth of color bring important cultural strengths to the table and that when capitalized on can lead to increased academic achievement, positive racial identity development, improved self-confidence and self-esteem, and increased resiliency” (p. 122). The cultural knowledge construct allows students of color to increase awareness of ethnic values as well correcting misnomers regarding the cultural heritages of others (Gay, 2010). Pilhofer (2011) added cultural knowledge, as a tool, could provide clarity around dealing with the challenges cultural differences are assumed to implicate. A major underpinning for the theme of cultural knowledge was to use the knowledge to impact multiple academic areas to ultimately improve student achievement, curriculum content, classroom management and assessment (Hulan, 2015).

The cultural knowledge construct is collectively viewed as teachers valuing cultural experiences that bridge the gap between home and school relationships (Gay, 2010; Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Pilhofer, 2011). Subsequently, teachers align student experiences via content, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, classroom management and assessment (Gay, 2006; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Students learning from one another is also a characteristic, which demonstrates students valuing knowledge from diverse cultures and backgrounds (Gay, 2010). This acceptance further opens up students' oral discourse and written responses to analysis and reconstruction. Gay (2010) also suggests within this construct, students function as members of extended family, reinforce accountability for one another's learning, and build caring relationships.

Comprehensive elements that support the foundation of improving student achievement practices are aligned as descriptor under each construct in the framework (Table 1). Gay (2010) aligned the descriptor, comprehensive with cultural knowledge. In previous studies, Ladson-Billing's (1997) observed supportive characteristics that fall within the meaning of the construct in studies; thus, strengthening the need to include cultural knowledge as a construct in the framework. The next descriptor related to cultural knowledge is emancipatory. Gay (2010) discussed that this descriptor referred to one's acceptance of other producers of knowledge from diverse cultures and groups. Lastly, multidimensional, is associated with this construct because it encompasses curriculum content, learning content, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, instructional techniques, and classroom management and performance assessments that may be used to increase achievement among students of color (Gay, 2010).

*Culturally Relevant Resources Construct.* Teachers who provide students of color with

access to culturally relevant resources established a philosophy of providing the necessary resources to impact student learning and help students become productive citizens. Components under this construct are the most challenging and most important. For example, dramatic performance styles of teaching including music and movement in learning were effective for African American students (Toppel, 2015). Lastly, Toppel's (2015) study also revealed the use of dramatization, music, and movement provided teachers the opportunity to enhance core-reading programs with features of ethnic and cultural diversity. Evidence from both school district incorporated a focus on the improving academics in reading and mathematics including instruction and hiring practices. In support, Gay's (2010) research recommended using similar resources to develop an ethos of achievement and celebrate individual and collective accomplishments of students.

*Holistic Practices Construct.* Students cultural background is valued as capital within the holistic practice construct. The holistic practice construct reaffirms the inclusion of critical components needed for a culturally responsive RTI model to level the playing field for African Americans, Hispanic, and other culturally and linguistically diverse students in the United States (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Gay, 2010; Toppel, 2015). Both school districts implemented an instructional model that provided for planning, differentiation, academic rigor, and enrichment.

Previous studies have addressed the critical outcomes for specific demographics of students and made recommendations on how holistic practices ensured an equal opportunity of success for all students (Klingner & Edwards, 2006; Gay, 2010; Allen & Steed, 2016).

Additional studies have provided precautionary reminders for school districts to consider when implementing holistic practices (Allen, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1997).

Klingner and Edwards (2006) as well as Gay (2010) found positive results in student

achievement when teachers were equipped with knowledge and understanding of students of color and ensured their students' experiences embodied an additive process, rather than subtractive, when using holistic practices. This finding also aligned with Milner's (2011) research of holistic practices, which found that when teachers learn about their students' culture through interactions with the students and their families, stereotypes are reduced, and teachers are more supportive (Allen & Steed, 2016). However, Ladson-Billings (1997) cautioned, students who identify with the cultural concepts, which are not understood by teachers of different cultures, may be perceived as not having the cultural capital necessary for academic success. Thoughts from Klingner and Edwards (2006) about increasing cultural capital strongly purported schools were responsible for providing parents with the assistance to support their children's' learning and to build their cultural capital.

Lastly, a final word from Badjanova and Ilisko (2015) discussed that holistic practices enabled appraisal of each learner's experience of knowledge and skills as well as careful consideration of their uniqueness and individuality. Holistic practices provide a segue into professional development construct in that it is expected for teachers, leaders, and students to receive the appropriate training when they are exposed to new learning situations (Finch, 2012).

*Professional Development Construct.* Research shows that a culturally responsive educational system must include professional development, which is focused on culturally responsive effective practices that extend beyond cultural appreciation activities (Finch, 2012; Garcia & Ortiz, 2006, Gay, 2000). To strengthen teacher practices, Garcia and Ortiz (2006) suggested staff development topics should include: "self-awareness, attitudes/beliefs, knowledge, and skills to increase understanding of socio-cultural influences on teaching and learning," (p. 7). Finch (2012) also discussed the importance of on-going professional development and avoiding

the train and hope approach as mentioned by Barns and Harlacher (2008). Training teachers to provide culturally responsive practices is expected in order for students to have appropriate instructional experiences (Finch, 2012). In addition to professional development for teachers, Ladson-Billings (1997) also strongly recommended increasing the learning capacity of students and parents to foster academic success. In addition to improving academic achievement, Ladson-Billings (1997) indicated professional development, which includes shared learning opportunities for teachers, students, and parents could eliminate communication barriers between school and home, reduce teacher stereotypes, and prepare students for life-long learning.

Contingencies for professional development are discussed further for teachers when they are not successful in providing culturally responsive practices to students (Ortiz & Garcia, 2006). Garcia and Ortiz (2006) included a previous study conducted by Ortiz (2002) that prompted the belief, “when clinical teaching is unsuccessful, teachers should have immediate access to general education support systems for further problem solving” (p. 9). The study identified peer or expert consultation, teacher assistance teams, and alternative programs and services were important areas to provide support for problem solving (Garcia & Ortiz, 2006). More specifically, peer or expert consultation included teachers working collaboratively to address students’ learning problems, sharing of instructional resources, conducting peer observations, peer modeling, and focusing on instructional planning (Garcia & Ortiz, 2006). Teacher assistance teams conducted meetings which focused on the following areas: 1) understanding the nature of the problem; 2) establishing priority interventions; 3) identifying problem solving strategies such as methods, strategies, or approaches; 4) assigning roles for carrying out responsibilities; and 5) following up with a monitoring plan (Garcia & Ortiz, 2006). This process of clinical teaching was designed for the teacher to request help for him/herself.

*Participants.* In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education drafted four principles to be used in state reform. The reforms addressed the following areas: 1) establishing college and career ready standards; 2) differentiated systems that impact recognition, accountability, and support; 3) increasing leadership and instruction; and 4) reducing duplication (AIRS, 2013). Reform efforts in the state of Florida by school districts addressed each of the four principles established by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2004 (ESEA). Additionally, low performing schools became a priority and focus schools became a part of the Turnaround Schools in the state of Florida. These schools were known for having the largest achievement gaps and lowest performance. Districts were required to submit *Turnaround Option Plans* to identify the strategies to impact student achievement. From 2014-2016, there were a total of 17 districts working with Turnaround Schools. The *AIRS Report (2013)* emphasized the mandates of the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and focused on increasing state accountability and improvement for all students, including students who struggled in reading and math basic skills.

Several states identified school-based models and best practices of RTI implementation, but one exemplary model was Florida. After a review of various state plans, *RTI-Based SLD Identification Toolkit Case Study: Florida*, as well as the *American Institute for Research (AIR) Review of State Flexibility Plan 2013*, a previous case study found that Florida had been acknowledged as a leader and an early adopter in RTI implementation and the incorporation of culturally responsive practices. In the Georgia plan, Florida was mentioned as having a mature RTI model along with Iowa and Minneapolis. A review of state flexibility plans conducted by AIR (2013) indicated that the state of Florida shifted to utilizing an RTI/MTSS model, which incorporated the use of culturally responsive practices, while LEAs concomitantly provided

relevant/appropriate professional development. *RTI-Based SLD Identification Toolkit Case Study: Florida* document revealed a significant decrease in identified students in the specific learning disability category between the years of 2006-2007 and 2012-2013. The aforementioned findings supported the researcher's choice to select Florida for participation in the previous and current studies.

### **Why is the Issue a Problem?**

Disproportionality contributed to the achievement gap and until it is effectively addressed, culturally and linguistically diverse students will continue to be referred and placed in special education (Skiba et al., 2006). Hosp and Reschly (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 10 studies between 1975 and 2000 examining referrals to special education and found that African Americans and Latino students were referred more often than White students. Albrecht, Skiba, Losen, Chung, and Middelberg (2012) discussed that this discrimination was “manifested in inequitable treatment in segregated and unequal schools and in disproportionate risk of receiving inadequate or inappropriate special education services as a result of systemic problems in general education” (p. 14). Skiba et al. (2008) conducted a study that revealed students from poverty backgrounds and students of color were more than likely to be taught by less experienced teachers in poorly funded schools that undergo challenges in recruiting and maintaining staff. Skiba et al. (2008) also contended “although less researched, available data demonstrates that students of color, especially African Americans, are overrepresented in more restrictive educational environments and underrepresented in less restrictive settings” (p. 7). Until the issue of disproportionate representation is effectively addressed, the issues of racial disparity will continue.

## **Conclusion**

There are still many unanswered questions about response to intervention and ongoing research continues. As RTI continues to take center stage as a framework for considering equitable and consistent positive outcomes for all students, attention to these challenges is paramount. The state is a critically important unit of analysis if we are to understand the constructs of the RTI model, implementation, and impact of a response to intervention program on reducing disproportionality.

Given the history of disproportionate representation of minorities in special education, much consideration should be given to the way African American students are educated when educators, policymakers, and researchers participate in the RTI decision-making process as a means for positively affecting student outcomes (Proctor et al., 2012). A research agenda presented by Proctor et al. (2012) included specific steps for addressing RTI considerations for African American students from a tiered approach, including culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally fair standardized assessments, parent trainings, research-based curricula, professional development for teachers, university-school collaborations, implementation monitoring, responsiveness data tracking, and school wide evaluations. This research addressed the need for focusing on African American special education placements, which have not proven effective for these students, but have increased dropout rates, increased inadequately prepared students for college and employment, and increased incarceration rates.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

Chapter 3 outlines the overall research design and rationale employed in this study. It also includes a purpose of the study, research questions, research method, research context, purposeful sampling, and a summary of the chapter.

#### Purpose of the Study

Research shows that while the promise of RTI can reduce disproportionality among culturally and linguistically diverse students, African Americans may still be overrepresented in special education (Proctor et al., 2012). Meanwhile, a culturally responsive approach to intervention is gaining popular acceptance among policymakers, practitioners, and parents. However, such an approach has not yet been systematically examined for effectiveness in reducing disproportionality among the referral and placement of African American students in special education. Therefore, the purpose of this study was three-fold:

- To identify the culturally responsive practices used with RTI models to reduce disproportionality among African Americans in special education in Pinellas County Schools in FL and Arlington Public Schools in VA.
- To identify the shared practices between the two school districts.
- To determine the relevant factors used to determine disproportionate representation.

The following questions guided this research study:

1. What are the culturally responsive practices used with RTI frameworks to reduce disproportionality in Pinellas County Schools in Florida and Arlington Public Schools in Virginia?

2. What are the shared practices in the components of the Culturally Responsive RTI framework between the two school districts?
3. In measuring disproportionality, what relevant factors are considered in determining if significant disproportionality is occurring in the states of Florida and Virginia?

### **Research Method**

For this study, the researcher used content analysis in order to develop a consensus on the knowledge and use of culturally responsive practices aligned with RTI models to decrease disproportionate representation in special education among African American students in Florida and Virginia. According to Busch et al. (2012), content analysis is used to determine the presence of specific language in text or sets of text. This study consisted of a review of text, which promotes the use of culturally responsive language aligned with RTI models. The text for this study existed broadly in the forms of public documents, federal documents, state documents, disseminated materials, newspaper articles, books, and book chapters. Text was coded or broken down into various categories that relate to a word, word phrase, sentence, or theme. Specific procedures for coding during the conceptual analysis phase of this study included: 1) deciding the level of analysis; 2) how many concepts to code for; 3) whether to code for existence or frequency of the concept; 4) deciding how to distinguish among concepts; 5) developing rules for coding the text; 6) deciding what to do with irrelevant information; and 7) analyzing the results.

This study was based on analysis across the two states. The researcher identified common themes through the identification of culturally responsive practices used with RTI models to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students referred and placed in special education. Each state was analyzed separately while maintaining continuity in the general analytic approach. The researcher developed a framework, CRP-RTI, grounded in

five theoretical constructs, themes, and categories: 1) cultural experiences; 2) cultural knowledge; 3) holistic practices; 4) culturally relevant resources; and 5) professional development. The researcher also developed familiarity with the two states and their culturally responsive education systems before entering the analysis phase and established a data collection effort that supported prolonged engagement.

Across the two research contexts, the researcher applied standard qualitative analysis techniques, content analysis. The researcher highlighted phrases, sentences or entire paragraphs from policy documents and reports to indicate whether they fell under a specific concept or category. Once a highlighted area or component was indicated, it was aligned with the appropriate category. In instances where statements from policy documents fell under more than one category, the statement was coded multiple times with various categories and organized in a clear format. The categories were further analyzed resulting in five themes emerging. The themes were organized into the tables. Check marks were made in the corresponding boxes on the proper matrix under the corresponding theme.

Once all the policy documents were coded, a total of all statements within a theme were counted. Themes with high counts were deemed areas of excellence that were already in line with the culturally responsive response to intervention model, CRP-RTI. Themes with low counts were opportunistic recommendations for the researcher to emphasize as implications for theory, policy, and practice. Because of the potential challenges in discerning patterns or emerging themes in the state policy documents, a final step in the content analysis was added, namely, color-coding. The researcher developed a color-coding system to highlight policy documents that allowed visualization of emergent themes. The colors red, blue, purple, orange, and green were assigned to each category or theme during the analysis phase.

## **Purposeful Sampling**

This study included two states for review and analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) call this type of sampling purposeful sampling. That is, sampling in which the subjects are chosen to be included because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The initial criteria for inclusion in the sample was that states must have public documents, which included policies and implementation reports, that addressed disproportionate representation through the implementation of a culturally responsive educational system. After careful vetting and due diligence, two states were selected as having exemplary and successful models of culturally responsive educational systems to be examined in greater depth with a follow-up qualitative component (i.e., content analysis). Ultimately, only two states were included in this study, Florida and Virginia, both members of the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB).

## **Participants**

For the state of Florida, the Pinellas County School District was selected for its references in previous studies as a leader in RTI (AIRS, 2013). For the state of Virginia, the Arlington Public School District was selected because of the multiple culturally responsive documents presented (i.e. state plans, technical assistance, and implementation reports).

Florida's efforts at improving student achievement addressed the four school reform principles established in 2011 by the U.S Department of Education, which were based on the 2002 reauthorization of IDEA state accountability measures. By the 2013- 2014 school year, low performing schools known as priority schools and focus schools became a part of the Turnaround Schools group. Consequently, Pinellas County Schools was designated as a Turnaround School district. Schools within this district were known for having the largest

achievement gaps and lowest performance. To address academic performance, districts were required to submit recommendations, identifying strategies to address the needs of low performing schools. The 2016-2017 Pinellas County Schools Turnaround Recommendations Plan State Accountability Report Results identified 22 schools in turnaround status for the 2013-2014 academic year, 18 schools in turnaround status for the 2014-2015 academic year, and 12 schools in turnaround status for the 2015-2016 academic year. Documents representing Pinellas County Schools were selected to identify culturally responsive practices that were used to reduce disproportionate representation in special education among African American students in identified school districts in Florida and Virginia.

### **Procedures**

This study coded primary and secondary source materials, existing written and disseminated material, and public records (i.e. surveys, state documents, district plans, federal policy documents, and implementation reports) to determine the extent to which culturally responsive practices used with RTI models reduced disproportionate representation in special education among African American students in identified school districts in Florida and Virginia. Such materials included:

1. *Blueprint for Tier 3 Implementation: A results driven system for Supporting Students with Serious Problems: Florida Multi-tiered System of Supports Implementation Components*
2. *Florida Problem Solving/Response to Intervention Project: Year 4 Evaluation Report (2013 School Year)*
3. *The Florida Flexibility Plan (2014-2015 School Year)*

4. *Turnaround Option Plan for Pinellas School District in Florida (2014-2016 and 2016-2017 School Years)*
5. *Current IDEA Reports (i.e. Annual Reports to Congress 2018)*

With Florida, identified as a SREB state, previously, additional SREB states were analyzed for culturally responsive practices aligned with RTI models before completing a nationwide search. Of the 15 states left, Virginia was added to the study. Maryland and North Carolina were strongly considered. However, the accessible evidence of culturally relevant practices in Virginia far exceeded the public information that was readily available for other states on the World Wide Web.

In searching for culturally responsive practices within the state of Virginia, the study found a disseminated memo entitled the *2015 Fall Institute: Reframing Disciplinary Practices Through a Tiered System of Supports*. This document acknowledged Virginia's commitment to increasing positive outcomes for students and creating a more engaging climate and culture through a tiered framework. Furthermore, this document provided evidence that culturally responsive practices were likely being used in the state of Virginia. Additional sources obtained from the Virginia Department of Education and Arlington Public Schools' websites and used to conduct the study included:

1. *Level 1: Consultation-Early Intervention Services Survey*
2. *Reframing Disciplinary Practices- Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports*
3. *Arlington Public Schools Strategic Plan (2011-2017 School Years)*
4. *Virginia's Response to Intervention Initiative*

The *2012 Virginia Flexibility Request* revealed that RTI was first implemented in 2007 in Virginia. The initial review further revealed 24 elementary schools on the priority list in the

state. Richmond County was identified with the most elementary schools on the priority since the 2012-2013 reporting. Richmond County did not have readily available evidence of culturally responsive language as the researcher conducted a search on the world wide web. Next, a search for school districts incorporating culturally responsive RTI was conducted for the state of Virginia. The *2012 Virginia Flexibility Request* was coded for culturally responsive practices.

### **Pilot Study**

This research was an expansion of a previous case study conducted within a school district in Florida by the researcher. The previous research, a qualitative review, documented experiences of a school district in Pinellas County, Florida, implementing culturally responsive approaches with RTI that serviced African American students in special education and general education. The previous research used primary and secondary source materials, existing written and disseminated material and public records (i.e. policy documents and implementation reports). Primary and secondary source materials highlighted successes and possible challenges to reducing disproportionality in special education for African American students in the state of Florida. Surveys, state documents, and federal policy changes were reviewed to determine the extent of impact on whether culturally responsive modifications contributed to a decrease of African American students identified in the specific learning disability category. The materials obtained from the Florida Department of Education and Pinellas County School District's websites and used to conduct the study included:

1. *Blueprint for Tier 3 Implementation: A Results Driven System for Supporting Students with Serious Problem Behaviors (2014 School Year)*
2. *Florida Multi-tiered System of Supports Implementation Components*
3. *Florida Problem Solving and Response to Intervention Project*

4. *Year 4 Evaluation Report (2013 School Year)*
5. *The Florida Flexibility Plan (2015 School Year)*
6. *Turnaround Option Plan for Pinellas School District in Florida*
7. *State Board of Education Action Item(s)*
8. *Current IDEA Annual Reports*

### **Data Analysis**

Two data sources supported each segment of this study. The cornerstone of each data collection component was archival document analysis (i.e., policy documents, federal documents, and implementation reports), supplemented with data collection of indicators of disproportionate representation: namely, risk indices, and/or risk ratios. In addition to the researcher identifying specific culturally responsive practices used to reduce disproportionate representation; the researcher also sought to determine to what extent the data collection of indicators was similar in reporting disproportionate representation for both states. Definitions of the indicators used to determine disproportionate representation were coined by experts and referenced for the study (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Skiba et al., 2008).

The chief challenge in interpretation concerned the different policy and program contexts of the two states. While the researcher could not control for type of policy and program, the nature of qualitative data allowed the researcher to interpret findings and extract themes about the importance of culturally responsive education systems, with the caveat that they were not necessarily generalizable and required further testing in larger controlled studies. Since this study only included two states, generalizing to culturally responsive education systems in other states is constrained. Because qualitative research, specifically, content analysis, is highly dependent upon context, the researcher provided additional information about the inquiry to help



determine if the emergent themes could be transferred in other contexts. However, with limited knowledge of other states, the researcher could not, confidently, make such an assertion.

### **Inter-rater Reliability**

In addition, problems of inter-rater reliability in case studies question whether other coders would agree with the coding. By definition, inter-rater reliability means the extent to which sets of meanings held by multiple raters are congruent enough to describe and arrive at inferences about phenomena in the same way. In other words, would another person who coded and extracted concepts and themes from policy documents come to the same conclusion about the emergent themes? Since the researcher was the only individual who conducted the data collection, inter-rater reliability in this case refers to obtaining agreement on the description of the policy documents. To mitigate inter-rater reliability concerns, the researcher conferred with the chair of the dissertation committee and engaged in informal debriefing discussions about the extent to which identified themes and patterns were in common with the ones he recognized.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 described the methodology used in the study. Chapter 3 also included a discussion of the purpose of the study, research questions, research method, research context, purposeful sampling, data description, challenges, and inter-rater reliability. The next chapter will analyze and disseminate the results of this qualitative content analysis and address the research questions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND RESULTS**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 4 contains the results of an extensive review of two school districts to examine practices combined with RTI models to reduce disproportionate representation among African Americans in special education. To begin the qualitative data collection process for this study, the researcher conducted an online review of public documents, state documents, disseminated information, district manuals, and flexibility requests submitted to the federal government by two states, Florida and Virginia. Next, three research questions were purposefully designed to draw similarities between states who had current accessible data available for incorporating culturally responsive practices with a response to intervention model to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education and to review the relevant factors in calculating disproportionate representation. In addition to presenting the documents collected for this study, Chapter 4 organizes the data, answers the three research questions, and presents a summary of the findings.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

Research shows that RTI has the potential to reduce disproportionality among culturally and linguistically diverse students. However, this does not change the data that show that African Americans may still be overrepresented in special education (Proctor et al., 2012). Meanwhile, a culturally responsive approach to intervention and instruction is gaining popular acceptance among policymakers, practitioners, and parents. Nevertheless, such an approach has not yet been systematically examined for effectiveness in reducing disproportionality among African American students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was three-fold:

- To identify the culturally responsive practices used with RTI models to reduce disproportionality among African Americans in special education in Pinellas County Schools in FL and Arlington Public Schools in VA.
- To identify the shared practices between the two school districts.
- To determine the relevant factors used to determine disproportionate representation.

### **Background of the Study**

This study expanded on a previous case study of Florida, as a model state, which successfully incorporated culturally responsive practices with a response to intervention model to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students. Since the original study included a school district, which was a member of the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB), this study also included a school district from a state within the SREB, Virginia, also known for implementing culturally responsive practices with a response to intervention model.

### **Overview of Documents**

To begin the qualitative data collection process for this study, the researcher conducted an online review of public documents, state documents, disseminated information, and district manuals of two states, Florida and Virginia. Flexibility requests submitted to the federal government by the two states were also reviewed. These documents were analyzed to determine if they contained evidence of culturally responsive language or practices. Seventeen documents were reviewed, 11 from the state of Florida and six from the state of Virginia. From the state of Florida, the researcher reviewed the following documents:

1. *Florida's Blueprint for Learning-Tier 3 Redesign (2014 School Year)*
2. *Florida Multi-Tiered System of Supports Implementation Components*

3. *Proposal for Supports and Interventions (Sept 8, 2014)*
4. *Florida's Final Scaleup Proposal (2014 School Year)*
5. *The Florida Flexibility Plan (2014-2015 School Year)*
6. *Turnaround Option Plan for Pinellas School District in Florida (2015-2016 and 2016-2017 School Years)*
7. *Pinellas County School Tiered interventions and Supports (2014-2015 and 2016-2017 School Years)*
8. *Florida's Positive behavior intervention and Support Project Annual Report (2015-2016 School Year)*
9. *Pinellas County Schools Turnaround Recommendations (2016-2017 School Year)*
10. *Research-Based Best Practices (March 2016)*

From the state of Virginia, the researcher reviewed the following documents:

1. *Level1: Consultation- Early Intervention Services Survey*
2. *Reframing Disciplinary Practices- Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports*
3. *Arlington Public School Minority Achievement 2016 Evaluation*
4. *Cultural Competence Curriculum (2009-2010 School Year)*
5. *Virginia ESEA Flexibility Request (2012)*

### **Culturally Responsive Practices Aligned with the Theoretical Framework**

The aforementioned documents were analyzed for the purpose of collecting data to answer three research questions. From the analysis of the data, the theoretical framework from Chapter 2 was used as a guide to sort the culturally responsive practices under the following constructs: 1) professional development; 2) cultural experience; 3) cultural knowledge; 4) holistic practices; and 5) culturally relevant resources. Once identified for both states, culturally

responsive practices aligned with the theoretical framework. Table 2 presented an alignment and description of the theoretical constructs, categories and research.

Table 2. Theoretical Constructs and Categories Aligned with the Literature

Theoretical Framework	Description	Categories	Aligned with Research
Cultural Experience	Described as valuing “funds of knowledge” to understand student experiences (Gay, 2010).  Building capacity for change (Green, 2013)	“Focus on Students”  Key words: Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving	(Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1997)
Cultural Knowledge	Viewed as valuing cultural experiences that bridge the gap between home and school relationships.  An alignment of student experiences via content, classroom climate, student-teacher relationships, classroom management and assessment.  Community of knowledge seekers Inquiry, (Green, 2013)	“Behavior is essential”  Key Words: Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry	(Klingner & Edwards 2006; Gay 2010; Pilhofer, 2011)

Table 2 (Continued)

<p>Holistic Practices</p>	<p>Practices that address “students’ academic, cultural, and emotional well-being” and seeks to address other aspects via “professional development and the development of a community of knowledge seekers.”</p>	<p>“Addressing Students” Key Words: Meeting the needs of others- students, parents</p>	<p>(Proctor, et al. 2012 &amp; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Allen &amp; Steed, 2015; Patel, 2003)</p>
<p>Culturally Relevant Resources</p>	<p>Resources that support student achievement (e.g. incorporate collaboration, creativity, risk taking, and communication address multiple areas related to instructional content, academics, discipline, behavior) Mastery (Green, 2013)</p>	<p>“Aligning Practices with Students” Key words: Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p>(Ladson-Billing, 1997; Proctor et al. 2012; Toppel, 2015)</p>
<p>Professional Development</p>	<p>Structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes.</p>	<p>“Accountability” Key Words: Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices,</p>	<p>(Darling-Hammond Hyler, M. &amp; Gardner, M., 2017)</p>

## Research Questions

Collectively viewed as data by the researcher, all of the documents collected for the study were analyzed for culturally responsive RTI frameworks. As a result, a multitude of culturally responsive language and practices were identified in each school district and used to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are the culturally responsive practices used with RTI frameworks to reduce disproportionality in Pinellas County Schools in Florida and Arlington Public Schools in Virginia?
2. What are the shared practices in the components of the culturally responsive RTI framework between the two school districts?
3. In measuring disproportionality, what relevant factors are considered in determining if significant disproportionality is occurring in the states of Florida and Virginia?

*Research Question 1.* To answer research question one, “What are the culturally responsive practices used with RTI frameworks to reduce disproportionality in Pinellas County Schools in Florida and Arlington Public Schools in Virginia?” the researcher highlighted phrases, sentences or entire paragraphs from policy documents and reports to identify culturally responsive language and practices identified by the two school districts. Sixty-three culturally responsive practices were coded from the content analysis for Pinellas County Schools District in Florida. Seventy-nine culturally responsive practices in Arlington Public Schools in Virginia were coded from the content analysis. This chapter includes detailed findings of the culturally responsive practices identified in Arlington Public Schools in Virginia and Pinellas County Schools, in Florida. The findings were also organized into Tables 3 and 4 in this chapter.

The first document reviewed for the study was the *Florida ESEA Flexibility Request* (2012). Analysis of this document revealed culturally responsive language along with specific culturally responsive practices. The culturally responsive language included, “culturally and developmentally appropriate language.” The specific practice included, “culturally and developmentally appropriate materials being utilized to support student learning.”

In examining the document entitled *Pinellas County/Tiered Supports and Interventions* for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years, the researcher found both versions included culturally responsive language and specific culturally responsive practices. Qualifying culturally responsive language included, “culturally responsive intervention and restorative practices.” Culturally responsive language and practices were also identified in the document entitled, *Proposal for Additional Assistance at Selected Schools, September 8, 2014*. The culturally responsive language identified in the document included: “culturally sensitive and responsive teaching.” Specific culturally responsive practices included in the document were as follows:

- “Preferential human resource processes”
- “Ongoing professional development will occur on a monthly basis after school for content along with embedded implementation with monitoring and additional support. The content provided will consist of the following topics: Co-teaching Processes and Routines-What does co-teaching look like and sound like? Culturally Sensitive and responsive teaching.”

A review of *Florida’s Blueprint for Learning Tier 3 Redesign* (2014) revealed culturally responsive language and culturally responsive practices. Specific language included: “culturally responsive practices” and “culturally responsive practices to meet the diverse needs of students.” The specific culturally responsive practices in the document included:



- “Staff understanding that learning is mediated by culture.”
- “Tier 3 redesign plan emphasizes culturally responsive practices to meet the diverse needs of all learners.”
- “Resources (e.g., time, personnel, materials) are specifically allocated for the planning and delivery of evidence-based instruction and intervention that reflect student diversity and result in learning opportunities for all students.”
- “Data are collected and analyzed on how intervention efforts are impacting student performance across various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups.”
- “Data-based problem-solving informs how patterns of student performance vary across various cultural, racial, an ethnic group are addressed.”
- “Ongoing professional development and coaching support is provided to build capacity of interventions across all tiers to accommodate student diversity.”

As the analysis continued, the document entitled *Research-Based Best Practices – March 2016* revealed culturally responsive language and culturally responsive practices used in Pinellas County Schools in Florida. Specific culturally responsive language included: “culturally responsive pedagogy” and “culturally responsive.” The specific culturally responsive practices included:

- “Continue to refine a plan to more extensively support teachers in the area of culturally responsive pedagogy and determine ways to provide equity training for instructional staff at turnaround sites.”
- “Provide rigorous implementation of Culturally Responsive Intervention Model.”
- “Require evidence of events spotlighting student success, social clubs, and community involvement inside of the school.”

- “Provide rigorous implementation of Culturally Responsive Intervention Model/Restorative Practices/Discipline Tracker System. This may include required peer mediation systems, flexible discipline coding and social service interventions.”
- “Continue the quarterly meetings with the JWB staff, PCS district staff, family navigators, mental health clinicians, school social workers, and school psychologists to share best practices for continuous improvement of additional wrap-around services.”
- “Provide a structure for professional learning communities (PLCs) to occur among the school social workers with their supervisor, the school psychologist with their supervisor, the family navigators with their supervisor, and the mental health clinicians with their supervisor.”
- “Provide paraprofessional teaching partners to each school (per model).”
- “Continue to utilize additional instructional support (e.g., paraprofessionals). Allow for flexibility of hiring and staffing at each school site to enhance academic support.”
- “Collaborate with external partner(s) on “diversity hiring” focus.”
- “Develop a unique, instructional model that provides for planning, differentiation, academic rigor and enrichment; and examine the current curriculum and alignment to standards, and the degree to which the materials support the learning and engagement of the student population were identified as culturally responsive practices.”
- “Provide cross-departmental supports and monitoring of the quality of family

engagement activities at these school sites to ensure alignment with best practices for family engagement.”

- “Extend the instructional school day to accommodate flexible instructional model, student intervention and recess time.”
- “Continue to provide ongoing school visits, ISM supports and district monitoring.”
- “Enhance communication with those agencies who offer after school programming to maximize the enrollment of students in after school programs and to align these efforts to student needs.”
- “Provide embedded full-time instructional coaches and priority access to the Just-in-Time coaches (within a week of request).”

*Florida’s Positive Behavior Intervention & Support Project Annual Report (2015-2016)*

included the following evidence of incorporating culturally responsive language in the document: “help to prepare educators for culturally practices.” Culturally responsive practices used in Pinellas County included: “Respectful conversations about identity, culture, and disability are necessary for correcting demographically-based disparities.”

Each practice was analyzed for patterns, characteristics and similarities that related to the theoretical framework, which guided the categorizing process to develop the themes. The themes will be revealed after the discussing the culturally responsive practices found in Virginia.

Table 3. Culturally Responsive Practices in Pinellas County Schools in Florida

Source: Pinellas County Tiered Interventions and Support (2014-2016)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
		<p>Culturally and developmentally appropriate</p> <p>Culturally and developmentally appropriate materials are utilized to support student learning</p>		

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Proposal for additional assistance at selected schools September 8, 2014				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
		<p>Culturally Sensitive and responsive teaching</p> <p>preferential human resource processes,</p>		<p>Ongoing professional development will occur on a monthly basis after school for content along with embedded implementation with monitoring and additional support</p> <p>The content provided will consist of the following topics: Co-teaching Processes and Routines- What does co-teaching look like and sound like? Culturally Sensitive and responsive teaching</p>

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Research-Based Best Practices – March 2016 Florida				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential.</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
<p>Provide rigorous implementation of Culturally Responsive Intervention Model/Restorative Practices/Discipline Tracker System. This may include required peer mediation systems, flexible discipline coding and social service interventions</p>	<p>... culturally responsive pedagogy...</p> <p>Culturally Responsive Intervention Model</p> <p>Require evidence of events spotlighting student success, social clubs, and community involvement inside of the school.</p>		<p>Wrap-around services- Continue the quarterly meetings with the JWB staff, PCS district staff, family navigators, mental health clinicians, school social workers, and school psychologists to share best practices for continuous improvement of additional wrap-around services</p>	<p>Continue to refine a plan to more extensively support teachers in the area of culturally responsive pedagogy and determine ways to provide equity training for instructional staff at turnaround sites.</p> <p>Wrap-around services- Continue the quarterly meetings with the JWB staff, PCS district staff, family navigators, mental health clinicians, school social workers, and school psychologists to share best practices for continuous improvement of additional wrap-around services</p>

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Research-Based Best Practices – March 2016 Florida (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential.</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
<p>Examine the current curriculum and alignment to standards, and the degree to which the materials support the learning and engagement of the student population</p>	<p>Collaborate with external partner(s) on “diversity hiring” focus.</p> <p>Develop a unique, instructional model that provides for planning, differentiation, academic rigor and enrichment.</p>	<p>Provide paraprofessional teaching partners to each school (per model). Continue to utilize additional instructional support (e.g., paraprofessionals). Allow for flexibility of hiring and staffing at each school site to enhance academic support.</p>	<p>Develop a unique, instructional model that provides for planning, differentiation, academic rigor and enrichment.</p>	<p>Provide a structure for professional learning communities (PLCs) to occur among the school social workers with their supervisor, the school psychologist with their supervisor, the family navigators with their supervisor, and the mental health clinicians with their supervisor.</p>

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Florida’s Positive Behavior Intervention & Support Project Annual Report 2015-2016				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential.</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
<p>...7 districts engaged with problem solving disproportionality with 48 schools, supported 9 schools in summarizing data for stakeholders to identify root causes.</p>	<p>Respectful conversations about identity, culture, and disability are necessary for correcting demographically-based disparities. These conversations lead to personal and professional growth, and help to prepare educators for culturally responsive practices. Analyze data to identify and problem solve and decrease discipline disproportionality and increase culturally responsive practices”</p>			<p>Culturally responsive practices Respectful conversations about identity, culture, and disability are necessary for correcting demographically-based disparities. These conversations lead to personal and professional growth, and help to prepare educators for culturally responsive practices.</p>



Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Pinellas County TOPS Plan 2014-2016				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<b>Category:</b> Focus on students	<b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential.	<b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students	<b>Category:</b> Addressing Students	<b>Category:</b> Accountability
<b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry	<b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving	<b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction	<b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents	<b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices
Data Coding				
Began screening every EBD student for gifted.	<p>Culturally Responsive Intervention/Restorative Practices</p> <p>“District Initiatives in Support of Minority Achievement</p> <p>Established the Summer Bridge program, which began in the summer of 2013.,</p> <p>Established wrap-around services at no cost to families in need.</p>	<p>Increased awareness and participation in the Khan Academy – a free personalized online exam preparation resource.</p> <p>Increased participation in Career/Technical Education</p> <p>Increased Extended Learning budgets and programs, including a 6-week Summer Bridge Program, partially supported by Title I funds.</p>		<p>Increased teacher training. A minimum of five additional training days a year are required at these schools, supported by Title I and Title II funds.</p> <p>Increased leadership training, including monthly training around disciplinary disparity and implicit bias.</p>

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Pinellas County TOPS Plan 2014-2016 (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
	<p>Beyond the Classroom – Provided online resources for at-home learning.</p> <p>MyON – Provided online reading resource available to all students.</p> <p>Internet Service – Partnered with Bright House to provide low-cost internet service for families in need.</p> <p>Increased funding for Extended Learning Programs</p> <p>Increased funding for Extended Learning Programs.</p>	<p>A comprehensive data matrix on teacher effectiveness to support recruitment and retention decisions</p> <p>Hiring and recruitment advantages provided to schools (ability to hire outside of transfer window, unique job fairs, etc.).</p> <p>Additional support services personnel provided to schools (full-time psychologist, social worker, etc.), supported by Title I funds.</p>		

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Pinellas County TOPS Plan 2014-2016 (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
	<p>Implemented STEM academies in all Title 1 schools and secured additional funding from Duke Energy (\$225,000).</p> <p>Provided Technology to Extend Learning</p> <p>Connect for Success – Provided more than 6,000 laptops that students at Title 1 schools can take home and keep at home all school year including the summer.</p>	<p>Secured and implemented funding from Juvenile Welfare Board to support Promise Time, an after-school program that provides students with quality reading and mathematics instruction</p> <p>Recruitment / retention / school performance pay bonuses, supported by Title I and Title II funds</p> <p>A comprehensive data matrix on teacher effectiveness to support recruitment and retention decisions</p>		

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Pinellas County TOPS Plan 2014-2016 (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
	<p>Established Parent University, a parent education program that is free and open to all families.</p> <p>Provided family engagement training with Dr. Karen Mapp / Harvard University</p>	<p>Additional paraprofessionals provided to schools per each school's needs, supported by Title I funds</p> <p>. Additional instructional coaches provided to schools per each school's needs, supported by Title I and Title II funds.</p> <p>Increased technology and software resources (take-home laptops for students, IStation, etc.), partially supported by Title I funds.</p> <p>Establishment of Transformation Zone team</p>		

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Pinellas County TOPS Plan 2014-2016 (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
	<p>Established Parent University, a parent education program that is free and open to all families. Provided family engagement training with Dr. Karen Mapp / Harvard University Created Summer STEM academies.</p>			

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Pinellas County Schools Turnaround Recommendations 2016-2017				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential.</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
<p>“Form a district Transformation Team that provided autonomy and reports directly to the Superintendent of Schools to impact turnaround school initiatives in a direct and timely manner. Provide direction and support from new Director of School Transformation.”</p>	<p>“Provide an extended school day and additional “extended learning” funding to support the needs of students who require additional intervention.”</p> <p>Develop a unique, instructional model that provides for planning, differentiation, academic rigor and enrichment. Provide teachers some flexible planning time so time can be logged off-site</p>		<p>Maintain current staffing model for support staff (social worker, guidance counselor, and psychologist) and commitment to restorative practices and alternatives to suspension in support of school climate.”</p>	<p>“Ensure that strong leaders are in place at all turnaround schools. Provide prospective leaders with a competency inventory to ensure that they are good fits to complete “turnaround” initiatives.”</p> <p>“Ensure that each school has high performing teachers.”</p>

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Pinellas County Schools Turnaround Recommendations 2016-2017 (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<b>Category:</b> Focus on students	<b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential.	<b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students	<b>Category:</b> Addressing Students	<b>Category:</b> Accountability
<b>Key Words: Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</b>	<b>Key words: Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</b>	<b>Key words: Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</b>	<b>Key Words: Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</b>	<b>Key Words: Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</b>
Data Coding				
“Provide principals and school staff with a greater degree of autonomy to design and adapt the curriculum and instructional day, under the guidance of the Director of School Transformation”	Maintain current staffing model for support staff (social worker, guidance counselor, and psychologist) and commitment to restorative practices and alternatives to suspension in support of school climate.”  “ Provide increased staffing resources to schools. Reduce the number of paras at each school and provide school staff with greater autonomy to use paras in support of specific, instructional needs.”	“Evaluate current staff and retain top teachers. Recruit and hire high performing teachers who show potential to work in turnaround schools.”  “Provide a competitive retention and recruitment bonus for instructional staff for and maintain the current school performance bonus for teachers and school leaders.”		Require five additional teacher professional development days and compensate teachers at their hourly rates. “

Table 3 (Continued)

Source: Pinellas County Schools Turnaround Recommendations 2016-2017 (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category;</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
		<p>“Provide principals and school staff with a greater degree of autonomy to design and adapt the curriculum and instructional day, under the guidance of the Director of School Transformation”</p> <p>Provide additional materials, training as needed.”</p> <p>“ Implement a substantial compensation package as a way to attract and retain the best teachers and school leaders.”</p> <p>“ Increase the existing retention and recruitment bonus for instructional staff to \$5,000</p>		



The first document representing Arlington Public Schools, Virginia was *Arlington Public Schools -Minority Achievement Evaluation (2016)*. The document included evidence of culturally responsive language and specific culturally responsive practices. The specific culturally language found in the document included the following language: “culturally competent and culturally responsive pedagogy.” Specific culturally responsive practices extracted from the documents included:

- “ Ensure that instruction is culturally competent across the system.”
- “Address the need for professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy as an approach to minimize opportunity gaps.”
- ”Pilot at the elementary level that will place two full-time instructional coaches in a selected school. The coaches, one with an expertise in math and one with an expertise in language arts, will be trained to provide job-embedded professional development in culturally responsive math and language arts instructional strategies.”
- “Provide instructional resources development in culturally responsive math and language arts instructional strategies was identified as culturally responsive practices used in Arlington Public Schools.”
- “...the Office will work with curriculum offices to provide instructional resources in content area culturally responsive pedagogy. In 2016-17 and 2017-18, the Office will continue to support curriculum offices in countywide professional development.”

The next document analyzed for the study was, *Reframing Disciplinary Practices-Virginia Tiered System of Supports*. Specific qualifying culturally responsive language included:

- “Culturally responsiveness, culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally competent Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation”
- “Cultural Validity, Cultural Relevance, Cultural Knowledge, and Cultural Equity”

Specific culturally responsive practices included in the document are as follows:

- “Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation-Monitoring disproportionality in discipline between dominant and non-dominant groups through analyzing data.”
- “Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation-Collaborating with families and community members for teaching and learning.”
- “Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation-Providing professional learning to increase awareness of differences between dominant and nondominant cultural patterns.”
- “CULTURAL VALIDITY- Supporting Decision Making”
- “CULTURAL RELEVANCE- Supporting Student Behavior”
- “CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE- Supporting Staff Behavior”
- “CULTURAL EQUITY- Supporting Social Competence & Academic Achievement; Professional Development - Legal Implications and Street “CRED”: CULTURAL EQUITY Dr. Brenda Walker--- Participants will develop culturally-responsive site-specific action plans; I’m Determined: Tools to Support Successful School Experiences Lee Anne Sulzberger”
- “Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) To Change Our Perspective on Teaching Positive Behavior Dr. Fran Smith & Dr. Susanne Croasdaile.”
- “Supporting Improvements in Behavioral Competence, Academic Achievement

and Social-Emotional Wellness”

- “Participants will develop culturally-responsive site-specific action plans that reflect their unique situations (this supports staff or builds the system for ...) relative to proactive classroom management and disciplinary systems (...these practices!). The session incorporates legal and ethical principles and strategies for practices (Look more practices or strategies that support our students!) that are inclusive of varied stakeholder groups including diverse families and community agents.”

In reviewing the document entitled *Virginia Department of Education Special Education Identification Process Surveys (n.d.)*, culturally responsive language found in the document included “culturally responsive process.” Culturally responsive language included in the document was as follows:

- “Level I: Early Intervention Survey-Level I refers to the earliest initiative (the formal or informal process) by which a teacher or other school staff seeks assistance for a student’s academic or behavioral needs. This is sometimes referred to as early intervention services.”
- “Level II: Team Meetings-Level II refers to a team that gives considerations to interventions and strategies for children with needs beyond regular education programming. Within the context of options, special education referrals are discussed. This is sometimes referred to as a problem solving or child study team.”
- “Level III refers to the process involved in determining a child’s eligibility for special education services.”

Since this document was a survey, the evidence collected from this document was in question form. For the purposes of the study, the questions were considered culturally responsive questions and were sorted as culturally responsive practices. The culturally responsive practices identified by levels included:

- LEVEL I: Consultation

“Rank order the most frequent referral source to the Problem-Solving Team.”

“On your team, what problem solving processes are used most often?”

“Who provides assistance to teachers with implementing the recommendations made by the Problem-Solving Team? (Rank order up to 5, if applicable)”

“Which approach is typically used for monitoring the success of the Problem-Solving Team’s recommendations?”

“How often is consideration given to cultural, environmental and economic factors that may be related to a student’s academic needs?”

“How often are students not referred for a special education evaluation due to cultural or environmental factors?”

“How often does the perceived level of parent/guardian support influence the decision to refer children for a comprehensive special education evaluation?”

- LEVEL II: Team Meetings

“What is the pre-referral team at your school called?”

“Who are the regular members of the Problem-Solving Team?”

“Who leads the Problem-Solving Team?”

“What is the primary function of the Problem-Solving Team?”

“Rank order the most frequent referral source to the Problem-Solving Team.”

“On your team, what problem solving processes are used most often?”

“Who provides assistance to teachers with implementing the recommendations made by the Problem-Solving Team?”

“Which approach is typically used for monitoring the success of the Problem-Solving Team’s recommendations?”

“How often is consideration given to cultural, environmental and economic factors that may be related to a student’s academic needs?”

“How often are students not referred for a special education evaluation due to cultural or environmental factors?”

“How often does the perceived level of parent/guardian support influence the decision to refer children for a comprehensive special education evaluation?”

“On average, how often does a problem-solving team meet to discuss a child prior to referring for a special education evaluation?”

“How often do referrals to the Problem-Solving Team become referrals for a comprehensive evaluation for special education services?”

“What effort is typically made by the Problem-Solving Team to increase cultural awareness if the referred child is from a different culture?”

“If efforts are made to increase cultural awareness, then how is this documented?”

“How are the needs of English Language Learners (ELL) who experience academic/behavioral difficulties primarily addressed?”

“In regard to the problem-solving team process, which of the following entities have provided training opportunities?”

“Does your school division provide training on a regular basis to assist you in

participating in the problem-solving process?”

“Were you provided any formal training to assist you in participating in the problem-solving process?”

“How would you rate your school division’s knowledge regarding IDEA’s response to intervention?”

“What effort is typically made by the Problem-Solving Team to increase cultural awareness if the referred child is from a different culture?”

“If efforts are made to increase cultural awareness, then how is this documented?”

“How are the needs of English Language Learners (ELL) who experience academic/behavioral difficulties primarily addressed?”

“In regard to the problem-solving team process, which of the following entities have provided training opportunities?”

“Does your school division provide training on a regular basis to assist you in participating in the problem-solving process?”

- LEVEL III: DECISION-MAKING/ELIGIBILITY TEAM

“What information is considered in making eligibility decisions?”

“How is information about environmental, cultural, and economic disadvantage considered in the decision-making process?”

“What additional provisions are made when assessing students from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds?”

“What other options are available to address student instructional and behavioral needs if the decision is that the student is not eligible for special education services?”

“Who regularly participates on the special education eligibility committee?”

“What information is examined to determine if the student has received appropriate instruction?”

“How is the eligibility decision made?”

“How frequently do parents’ attend eligibility committee meetings?”

“What procedures does your school system have to ensure that assessments address the students’ cultural, linguistic, and ethnic background?”

“What does the school division make available to develop examiners’ cultural competence to address cultural bias in assessment?”

“How often do you feel pressured to make a student eligible for special education services whenever the data may not clearly support the decision?”

As the analysis continued, culturally responsive evidence in the document entitled *ESEA Flexibility Request: Virginia Department of Education* (2013) were also identified. Although this document did not have any qualifying culturally responsive language, it provided another rationale for school districts to increase RTI efforts, as mandated by federal law. Thus, paving the way for school districts to implement culturally responsive practices. In this document, the Virginia Department of Education specifically announced its support of response to intervention at all school levels and offered demonstration sites to improve the RTI framework (VDOE, 2013). Serving as the foundation to implement culturally responsive practice, this document provided a framework for school district to address federal mandates for a differentiated recognition, accountability, and support system. The framework was analyzed for evidence of culturally responsive practices and the following focus areas were identified: 1) recognition, accountability, support, students with disabilities, English Language Learners (ELL), assistance

to all at-risk students; 2) support for teachers of Limited English Proficiency students and students with disabilities; and 3) school improvement planning. Each focus area was analyzed for evidence of specific culturally responsive practices and the following results emerged:

- “Recognition- The Virginia Index of Performance (VIP) program, Blue Ribbon Schools Program, and the Title I Distinguished Schools program will recognize schools demonstrating high academic performance and high graduation rates, as well as recognizing schools demonstrating significant progress toward meeting academic performance and graduation expectations.”
- “Accountability – Both Title I and non-Title I schools with significant performance and graduation gaps for the all students group as defined under the SOA will be held accountable under the Academic Review process...”
- “As required under the ESEA flexibility provisions, five percent of those Title I schools with the most significant reading, mathematics, and graduation rate gaps for the “all students” group will be identified for priority school status.”
- “The most pressing subgroup needs will be identified by focusing on three “proficiency gap groups” representing Virginia’s traditionally lower performing subgroups with the greatest gap in academic achievement:
  1. Gap group 1: students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students (unduplicated)
  2. Gap group 2: Black students, not of Hispanic origin, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students
  3. Gap group 3: Hispanic students, of one or more races, including students



with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged student

- “These supports and interventions include a detailed academic review process conducted by a team of experienced educators and school improvement planning tools and resources to inform school improvement planning efforts.”
- “...develop and implement an improvement plan that addresses the specific needs of the students in the identified gap groups.”
- “Divisions may work with appropriate offices at the Virginia Department of Education to design technical assistance and professional development that support schools with subgroups failing to meet annual measurable objectives.”
- “Schools identified as priority and focus schools will receive targeted support and interventions through the statewide system of support.”
- “Priority schools will hire an external Lead Turnaround Partner (LTP) or other external partner that is agreed upon by the Virginia Department of Education and the local school board to assist in implementing, at a minimum, a model that meets the USED turnaround principles or one of the four USED models.”
- “Focus schools will be required to work closely with a state-approved contractor and division team to develop, implement, and monitor intervention strategies designed to improve the performance of students identified as in danger of not meeting the academic achievement expectations or at risk of dropping out of school.”
- “Title I schools not meeting proficiency gap group targets or participation rates that are not identified as focus or priority schools and schools not Fully

Accredited will be required to use Indistar® to plan, monitor, and implement a plan for improvement.”

- Students with Disabilities

“Project SEARCH, a business-led model, is a collaborative between school divisions and local businesses that provide employability skills training and workplace internships that occur entirely in the workplace.”

“The Post-High School Community College Program is a supported education model that provides individualized supports to students with significant disabilities seeking postsecondary education to enhance their skills for employment, in an age-appropriate setting.”

“The Department of Education provides support and technical assistance to increase the number of partnerships between school divisions and institutions of higher education.”

- English Language Learners

“Virginia Board of Education adopted the ACCESS for ELLs (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners) as the statewide English language proficiency (ELP) assessment for Virginia.”

- Assistance to All At-Risk Students

“Project Graduation, which provides remedial instruction and assessment opportunities for students at risk of not meeting the Commonwealth’s diploma requirements”

- Algebra readiness Initiative- “which provides assistance in preparing students for

success in algebra.”

- Virginia Preschool Initiative- “provide quality preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds not served by Head Start.
- Virginia’s Early Warning System- “predict which students are at risk for dropping out of high school; target resources at the school- and division-level to support students not on track to graduate while they are still in school and before they drop out; and examine patterns and identify school climate issues that may contribute to disproportionate dropout rates”
- Support for Teachers of LEP Students and Students with Disabilities  
“General instruction, special education, and English as a second language (ESL) staff at the Department of Education work closely to ensure that materials developed, and professional development provided serve students with disabilities and LEP students.”
- School Improvement Planning  
“A two-day training entitled “Academic Language Development for English Learners (ELs)”  
“The “Fall Professional Development Academy for K-12 Teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs)”  
“T/TAC services increase the capacity of schools, school personnel, service providers, and families to meet the needs of children and youth. The T/TACs meet these needs through activities such as consultation, long-term systems change initiatives, information services, linking and networking resources together, lending library of multimedia resources and technology, referral to other

services, and workshops. In addition to responding to requests for services, T/TAC staff are deployed to schools and school divisions identified by the Virginia Department of Education as needing improvement through the School Improvement Office and/or the Federal Program Monitoring Office. The Virginia Department of Education has a comprehensive database on TTAC services, which is monitored to determine schools and school divisions that access those services.”

“Virginia has partnered with the Center on Innovation and Improvement for six years. As part of collaboration with the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center, Indistar®, an online portal created and managed by the Center on Innovation and Improvement, can be used by any division for any school in Virginia to track, develop, coordinate, and report improvement activities”

The final document, *Cultural Competence Initiative (2009-2010)*, includes strategies for district-wide implementation of cultural competence and cultural responsiveness among teachers, administrators, central office staff and students adapted for Arlington Public Schools. This document was analyzed for evidence of culturally responsive language, which included: “culturally responsive,” “culturally responsive teaching,” and “cultural responsiveness.” During this analysis, the five stage Framework of Cultural Competence was identified. Cultural competence referred to building capacity within students, teachers, administrators, and staff to appreciate cross-cultural relationships. Building cultural responsiveness referred to a way in which teachers provided instruction to students. Since the model, the framework for building cultural competence was discussed as a separate entity. This portion of the document was not analyzed for culturally responsive practices.

Cultural competency and culturally responsiveness were discussed as two separate, intertwining entities dependent on the other. Culturally responsive tools are recommended for teachers to use to build cultural responsiveness in the classrooms. These following tools were examined for culturally responsive practices:

- “Ferguson talks about five core tasks that a teacher needs to understand and execute in order to be a culturally responsive teacher who builds student success.

The tasks included:

1. Task One: Building Trust and Interest vs. Mistrust and Disinterest The teacher fosters in students a sense of trust and interest and a feeling of positive anticipation.
2. Task Two: Balancing Teacher Control vs. Student Autonomy The teacher and students seek and find an appropriate balance of teacher control and student autonomy through mutual testing and responses.
3. Task Three: Creating Ambitiousness vs. Ambivalence The teacher helps each student and collaborates with him or her to commit to ambitious learning goals and to overcome ambivalence by either party.
4. Task Four: Building Industriousness vs. Discouragement the teacher and students work industriously to achieve goals for learning and to overcome any discouragement due to setbacks.
5. Task Five: Fostering Consolidation vs. Irresolution and Disconnection. The teacher helps students to consolidate their learnings and to connect goals and learnings forward in anticipation of future classes and life experiences”

- “The Tripod Projects: Five Tasks and Stages of Classroom Social and Intellectual Engagement”
- Culturally Responsive Checklist for Personnel Who Work Directly with Children  
“These behaviors represent a culturally responsive teacher’s commitment to student success. Considering that cultural responsiveness is a journey, not a destination, teachers should use this list for personal reflection, as an affirmation for present behavior, as a roadmap for modifying behavior, and as an ultimate goal for responsive teaching.” See Table 4 for the culturally responsive checklist.

Table 4. Culturally Responsive Checklist for Employees who work with Children adapted for Arlington Public Schools

<b>Teaching Strategies That Are Culturally Responsive: A Self-Assessment</b>		
Instructions: Rate on a Scale "Not Evident," "Emerging," "Operational," and "Highly Functional" and provide evidence in your teaching practice.		
	Scale "Not Evident," "Emerging," "Operational," "Highly Functional"	Evidence
<b>Literacy</b>		
1. I intentionally teach reading and writing in the content areas.		
2. I use personal stories.		
3. I use journal writing.		
4. I explain the language and meaning before introducing concepts.		
5. I recognize that fluency in academic English requires five to seven years of work by routinely providing vocabulary in context.		
6. I explain concepts in language that students can understand.		
7. I introduce vocabulary using words in the context of students' experiences and knowledge.		
8. I move from students' conversational contexts of vocabulary to academic contexts.		
9. I allow the use of nonstandard English for learning purposes.		
	Scale "Not Evident," "Emerging," "Operational," "Highly Functional"	Evidence
10. I use visual prompts.		
11. I use visual organizers.		

Table 4 (Continued)

12. I teach grammar and mechanics in context.		
13. I make certain that the linguistic objective is visible in the room.		
14. I make certain that the content objective is visible in the room.		
<b>Trust v. Mistrust</b> <b>Interest v. Disinterest</b>		
1. I always answer student questions.		
2. I answer the questions that students have about the organization and structure of my classroom.		
3. I talk about how the goals and objectives for my subject matter relate to students' lives, present and future.		
4. I recognize that my classroom has a culture and that my students come to my class with cultural expectations about school.		
5. I overtly teach the culture of my classroom and that of the school.		
6. I share appropriate personal information in order to build trust in my classroom.		
7. I invite my students to share information about themselves.		
8. I ask for students' opinions.		
9. I accept the feelings of students.		
10. I have a program in place to make new students feel welcome.		
11. I pre-assess students' knowledge to determine appropriate strategies.		



Table 4 (Continued)

	Scale "Not Evident," "Emerging," "Operational," "Highly Functional"	Evidence
12. I plan for multiple learning styles.		
13. I communicate to students that they will do well in my class.		
14. I ask students to reflect on their thinking.		
15. I ask students to explain their answers.		
16. I explain difficult material in more than one way.		
17. I give directions in many different ways.		
18. I provide help during class.		
19. I provide help outside of class.		
20. I call on all students equally.		
21. I correct students' errors in a respectful manner.		
22. I provide wait time.		
23. I model courtesy through my words and actions.		
24. I praise students for learning behaviors.		
25. I give reasons for praise.		
26. I provide personal compliments.		
27. I use appreciative listening.		
28. I am excited about the subject matter that I teach.		
29. I value and encourage a positive working relationship with students' families.		

Table 4 (Continued)

<b>Balancing Teacher Control v. Student Autonomy</b>	Scale "Not Evident," "Emerging," "Operational," "Highly Functional"	Evidence
1. I invite student input.		
2. I provide students with choices about methods that they are able to use to learn material and complete assignments.		
3. I allow students to make decisions about assessments.		
4. I encourage students to design class rules.		
5. I give students choices about consequences.		
6. I ask students to design rubrics.		
7. I vary student leadership opportunities.		
8. I encourage students to think independently.		
9. I am consistent with all students.		
10. I am fair with all students.		
11. I vary assignments to demonstrate student mastery.		
12. I come within arm's length of each student regularly.		
13. I give students an opportunity to assess my performance.		

Table 4 (Continued)

<b>Ambitiousness V. Ambivalence</b>	Scale "Not Evident," "Emerging," "Operational," "Highly Functional"	Evidence
1. I communicate high goals for my students.		
2. I encourage students to formulate and articulate high goals for themselves.		
3. I overtly teach organizing and planning.		
4. I intentionally get students to see their successes and to use their success to scaffold new successes.		
5. I encourage students to think about their thinking.		
6. I encourage students to apply materials in new and different ways.		
7. I specifically ask students to set and reevaluate goals.		
8. I use portfolios and other forms of authentic assessment.		
9. I engage in student teacher conferencing.		
10. I plan for and facilitate peer conferencing.		
11. I assess teaching materials to ensure that they provide windows into other worlds.		
12. I assess teaching materials to ensure that they provide a mirror that reflects students' personal experiences.		
13. I actively challenge stereotypes and biases in the classroom.		
14. I design experiences that ensure that students from diverse backgrounds work cooperatively in my classroom.		

Table 4 (Continued)

<b>Industriousness v. Discouragement</b>	Scale "Not Evident," "Emerging," "Operational," "Highly Functional"	Evidence
1. I use students' knowledge in the classroom.		
2. I create an environment where students are excited about learning and want to work.		
3. I encourage students to strive for higher levels of success.		
4. I teach concepts and skills for mastery.		
5. I require rewriting.		
6. I encourage students to retake tests.		
7. I accept incomplete work and provide opportunities for completion at a high standard.		
8. I construct learning experiences of increasing complexity so that students experience success in more and more complex tasks.		
9. I provide opportunities for students to construct and use interactive materials.		
10. I teach thematic interdisciplinary content.		
11. I help students recover from failure.		
12. I take the initiative to address challenges that can impact a student's success in my classroom.		
13. I use assessments to inform students about their success.		
14. I advocate for the needs of my students.		
15. I collaborate with others to ensure the success of students, for example, Intervention Assistance Teams (IAT), supervisors, specialists, team meetings, etc.		
16. I create relationships that foster collaboration, mutual trust, and respect with students' families.		

Table 4 (Continued)

	Scale "Not Evident," "Emerging," "Operational," "Highly Functional"	Evidence
<b>Consolidation v. Irresolution</b>		
1. I actively use students' experiences to create connections between the students' life and the curriculum.		
2. I create experiences in which students see their place in the world.		
3. I provide practical applications for learning.		
4. I provide flexible grouping.		
5. I create an environment where the diversity of my students is visually represented.		
6. I use supplemental materials to provide a variety of perspectives		

Virginia Department of Education. (2009). *Cultural competence curriculum 2009-2010*.

Retrieved from

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special\\_ed/tech\\_asst\\_prof\\_dev/self\\_assessment/disproportionality/arlington\\_adapted\\_cultural\\_competence\\_notebook.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/tech_asst_prof_dev/self_assessment/disproportionality/arlington_adapted_cultural_competence_notebook.pdf)

Table 5. Culturally Responsive Practices used in Arlington Public Schools in Virginia

Source: Arlington Public Schools -Minority Achievement 2016 Evaluation				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
	<p>culturally competent</p> <p>culturally responsive pedagogy</p> <p>“... development in culturally responsive math and language arts instructional strategies”</p> <p>Ensure that instruction is culturally competent across the system.</p> <p>Address the need for professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy as an approach to minimize opportunity gaps.</p>			<p>Address the need for professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy as an approach to minimize opportunity gaps.</p>

Table 5 (Continued)

Source: Arlington Public Schools -Minority Achievement 2016 Evaluation				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential.</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
<p>Pilot at the elementary level that will place two full-time instructional coaches in a selected school.</p>		<p>Pilot at the elementary level that will place two full-time instructional coaches in a selected school.</p> <p>The coaches, one with an expertise in math and one with an expertise in language arts, will be trained to provide job-embedded professional development in culturally responsive math and language arts instructional strategies</p>		<p>The coaches, one with an expertise in math and one with an expertise in language arts, will be trained to provide job-embedded professional development in culturally responsive math and language arts instructional strategies</p> <p>Provide instructional resources development in culturally responsive math and language arts instructional strategies</p>

Table 5 (Continued)

Source: Arlington Public Schools -Minority Achievement 2016 Evaluation (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students.</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category;</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
		<p>Provide instructional resources development in culturally responsive math and language arts instructional strategies</p>		<p>“...the Office will work with curriculum offices to provide instructional resources in content area culturally responsive pedagogy. In 2016-17 and 2017-18, the Office will continue to support curriculum offices in countywide professional development.”</p>



Table 5 (Continued)

Source: Reframing Disciplinary Practices- Virginia Tiered System of Supports				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation	<p>Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation- Monitoring disproportionality in discipline between dominant and non-dominant groups through analyzing data</p> <p>Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation- Collaborating with families and community members for teaching and learning</p>		<p>Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation- Monitoring disproportionality in discipline between dominant and non-dominant groups through analyzing data</p>	<p>Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation- Collaborating with families and community members for teaching and learning</p>

Table 5 (Continued)

Source: Reframing Disciplinary Practices- Virginia Tiered System of Supports (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
	<p>Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation- Providing professional learning to increase awareness of differences between dominant and nondominant cultural patterns</p> <p>CULTURAL VALIDITY- Supporting Decision Making</p>	<p>CULTURAL RELEVANCE- Supporting Student Behavior</p>		<p>CULTURAL RELEVANCE- Supporting Student Behavior</p> <p>CULTURAL VALIDITY- Supporting Decision Making</p> <p>Culturally Responsive VTSS Implementation- Providing professional learning to increase awareness of differences between dominant and nondominant cultural pattern</p> <p>CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE-</p>

Table 5 (Continued)

Source: Reframing Disciplinary Practices- Virginia Tiered System of Supports (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
<p>CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE- Supporting Staff Behavior</p>	<p>CULTURAL EQUITY- Supporting Social Competence &amp; Academic Achievement</p>	<p>I'm Determined: Tools to Support Successful School Experiences Lee Anne Sulzberger</p>	<p>Professional Development - Legal Implications and Street "CRED": CULTURAL EQUITY Dr. Brenda Walker--- Participants will develop culturally-responsive site-specific action plans</p>	<p>Supporting Staff Behavior</p> <p>CULTURAL EQUITY- Supporting Social Competence &amp; Academic Achievement</p> <p>Professional Development - Legal Implications and Street "CRED": CULTURAL EQUITY Dr. Brenda Walker--- Participants will develop culturally-responsive site-specific action plans</p> <p>I'm Determined: Tools to Support Successful School Experiences Lee Anne Sulzberger</p>

Table 5 (Continued)

Source: Virginia Department of Education Special Education Identification Process Survey				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
<p>... culturally responsive process...</p> <p>LEVEL I: Consultation</p> <p>LEVEL II: Team Meetings</p> <p>LEVEL III: DECISION-MAKING/ELIGIBILITY</p>				

Table 5 (Continued)

Source : Arlington Flexibility Request 2012				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<p><b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Focus on students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students</p> <p><b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Addressing Students</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents</p>	<p><b>Category:</b> Accountability</p> <p><b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices</p>
Data Coding				
<p>Project SEARCH, a business-led model, is a collaborative between school divisions and local businesses that provide employability skills training and workplace internships that occur entirely in the workplace.”</p>	<p>“Recognition- The Virginia Index of Performance (VIP) program, Blue Ribbon Schools Program, and the Title I Distinguished Schools program will recognize schools demonstrating high academic performance and high school graduation”</p>	<p>“Priority schools will hire an external Lead Turnaround Partner (LTP) or other external partner that is agreed upon by the Virginia Department of Education and the local school board to assist in implementing, at a minimum, a model that meets the USED</p>	<p>“The most pressing subgroup needs will be identified by focusing on three “proficiency gap groups” representing Virginia’s traditionally lower performing subgroups with the greatest gap in academic achievement”</p>	<p>Accountability – Both Title I and non-Title I schools with significant performance and graduation gaps for the all students group as defined under the SOA will be held accountable under the Academic Review process...”</p>

Table 5 (Continued)

Source: Arlington Flexibility request 2012 (cont'd)				
Theoretical Construct Cultural Knowledge	Theoretical Construct Cultural Experience	Theoretical Construct Culturally Relevant Resources	Theoretical Construct Holistic Practices	Theoretical Construct Professional Development
<b>Category:</b> Behavior is essential	<b>Category:</b> Focus on students	<b>Category:</b> Aligning Practices with Students	<b>Category:</b> Addressing Students	<b>Category:</b> Accountability
<b>Key Words:</b> Discipline, Positive behavior, Support, Inquiry	<b>Key words:</b> Family Collaboration, Programs, disproportionate representation, choice, Data based problem solving	<b>Key words:</b> Hiring, Compensation, Teacher type, Leadership, technology, instruction	<b>Key Words:</b> Meeting the needs of others-students, parents	<b>Key Words:</b> Students, Teachers, additional stakeholders, Practices
Data Coding				
“The Post-High School Community College Program is a supported education model that provides individualized supports to students with significant disabilities seeking postsecondary education to enhance their skills for employment, in an age-appropriate settings	“Gap group 1: students with disabilities, English language learners, and economically disadvantaged students “  “Gap group 2: Black students, not of Hispanic origin, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and disadvantaged”	turnaround principles or one of the four USED models.”  “Project Graduation, which provides remedial instruction and assessment opportunities for students at risk of not meeting the Commonwealth’s diploma requirements”	“These supports and interventions include a detailed academic review process conducted by a team of experienced educators and school improvement planning tools and resources to inform school improvement planning efforts.”	As required under the ESEA flexibility provisions, five percent of those Title I schools with the most significant reading, mathematics, and graduation rate gaps for the “all students” group will be identified for priority school status”  Divisions may work with appropriate offices at the Virginia Department of Education to design technical assistance and professional development that support schools with subgroups failing to meet annual measurable objectives.”

*Research Question 2.* Research question two, “What are the shared practices in the components of the culturally responsive RTI framework between the two school districts?” examined the shared practices in the components of the culturally responsive RTI framework between the two school districts. This analysis revealed that both school districts employed the use of culturally responsive practices that aligned to the five themes from the theoretical framework presented in second chapter of this study. These themes were: 1) professional development; 2) cultural experience; 3) cultural knowledge; 4) holistic practices; and 5) culturally relevant resources. The analysis revealed that both school districts promoted culturally competent instruction. Evidence of culturally competent instruction were identified in the following phrases and statements:

- Arlington Public Schools: “ensure that instruction is culturally competent across the system.”
- Pinellas County Schools: “Culturally and developmentally appropriate materials are utilized to support student learning.”

Both school districts provided ongoing support to all stakeholders in the community. Evidence of support to all stakeholders in the community were identified in the following phrases and statements:

- Arlington Public Schools: “Participants will develop culturally responsive site-

- Pinellas County Schools: “Instructional coaches, one with an expertise in math and one with an expertise in language arts, will be trained to provide job-embedded professional development in culturally responsive math and language arts instructional strategies.”
- Pinellas County Schools: “The content provided will consist of the following topics: Co-teaching Processes and Routines- What does co-teaching look like and sound like? Culturally Sensitive and responsive teaching.”
- Pinellas County Schools: “Continue to refine a plan to more extensively support teachers in the area of culturally responsive pedagogy and determine ways to provide equity training for instructional staff at turnaround sites.”
- Pinellas County Schools: “Staff understanding that learning is mediated by culture”

Both school districts provided preferential hiring practices. Evidence of preferential hiring practices were identified in the following phrases and statements:

- “...develop a pilot at the elementary level that will place two full-time instructional coaches in a selected school”
- “Provide paraprofessional teaching partners to each school (per model). Continue to utilize additional instructional support (e.g., paraprofessionals). Allow for flexibility of hiring and staffing at each school site to enhance academic support.”
- “Enhanced family engagement (Dr. Valerie Brimm, Director of Strategic Partnerships) - parents will be expected to: o attend monthly Parent/Family meetings – there will be a campaign to promote participation throughout the community”

Both school districts promoted the involvement of collaborating with external partners.



Evidence of promoting the involvement of collaborating with external partners was identified in the following phrases and statements:

- “Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) To Change Our Perspective on Teaching Positive Behavior Dr. Fran Smith & Dr. Susanne Croasdaile”
- “Collaborate with external partner(s) on “diversity hiring” focus.”

Both school districts employed the use of a multi-tiered system of support, which promoted the use of positive behavior and supports. Evidence of such was identified in the following phrases and statements:

- “VTSS: Virginia Tiered System of Support: Systemic approach that allows students to receive multiple levels of supports. Monitoring disproportionality in discipline between dominant and non-dominant groups through analyzing data”
- “Monitoring disproportionality in discipline between dominant and non-dominant groups through analyzing data”
- “FL-PBIS: Positive Behavior Intervention and Support”
- “The schools will implement Positive Behavioral Supports using the Florida Positive Behavioral Support Project Model under the supervision and training of the University of South Florida.”
- “Data are collected and analyzed on how intervention efforts are impacting student performance across various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups.”
- “Data-based problem-solving informs how patterns of student performance vary across various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups are addressed.”

Both school districts promoted family collaboration. Evidence of promoting family collaboration was identified in the following phrases and statements:

- Arlington Public Schools: “Collaborating with families and community members for teaching and learning”
- “Enhanced family engagement (Dr. Valerie Brimm, Director of Strategic Partnerships) - parents will be expected to: attend monthly Parent/Family meetings – there will be a campaign to promote participation throughout the community.”

To answer research question two, each practice was analyzed for patterns, characteristics and similarities that related to the framework, which guided the alignment process.

*Research Question 3.* To answer research question three, “In measuring disproportionality, “What relevant factors are considered in determining if significant disproportionality in occurring in the states of Florida and Virginia?” the researcher collected evidence for the criteria used to measure significant disproportionality based on race and ethnicity that occurred with students with disabilities (SWD) with regards to identification, placement and discipline for all seven subgroups: 1) Hispanic/Latino of any race, and for individuals who are non-Hispanic/Latino only; 2) American Indian or Alaska Native; 3) Asian; 4) Black or African American; 5) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; 6) White; and 7) Two or more races USDOE, 2017). The methodology for determining significant disproportionality was mandated by the federal government. According to the *Virginia Part C FFY 2016 State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report*, evidence revealed that both states’ methodology for determining significant disproportionality included calculating a reasonable cell size and calculating a reasonable minimum N–size to determine the risk ratio for the purposes of establishing a threshold. The states specific criteria within the methodology for

determining significant disproportionality did, however, vary between the two states, Florida and Virginia.

Florida Part C FFY 2016 State Performance Plan/Annual Report Indicator 10 revealed Florida's methodology for measuring disproportionate representation that calculates risk ratios by using minimum cell size of 10 (numerator) divided by a reasonable minimum N-size of 30 (denominator). The threshold for the subgroups was set at 3.5. If significant disproportionality occurred among the subgroups, the states were required to designate 15% of IDEA allocations to address disproportionality. Significant disproportionality also allowed comprehensive coordinating intervening services funds for students not receiving special education and students with disabilities.

The Virginia Part C FFY 2016 State Performance Plan/Annual Performance report identified a two-step analysis in monitoring disproportionate representation. The report also revealed that a risk ratio was applied to division level data to identify disproportionate representation. Virginia's methodology for calculating risk ratios consisted of a reasonable a minimum cell size is 10 (numerator) and/or minimum n-size is 10 (denominator) (Skiba et al, 2006) . Through an extensive analysis, the report indicated that the Virginia Department of Education determined a risk ratio of 2.0 or above was representative of disproportionate representation. The second step of analysis was required for only the schools that met the criteria for disproportionate representation. This status was confirmed by logging on to the Single Sign-On Web-Systems (SSWS) Special Education Indicators application. Table 6 includes a comparison between both states in monitoring disproportionate representation.

Table 6. Criteria used to monitor disproportionate representation in Florida and Virginia

Methodology for Determining Significant Disproportionality	
<u>Florida</u>	<u>Virginia</u>
Reasonable minimum cell size  Numerator- Cannot be greater than 10	Reasonable minimum cell size  Numerator- Cannot be greater than 10
Reasonable minimum N-size – risk for all other groups  Denominator- Cannot be greater than 30	Reasonable minimum N-size – risk for all other groups  Denominator- Cannot be greater than 10
Risk ratio  Threshold- set at 3.5	Risk ratio  Threshold- set at 2.0

Adapted from Virginia and Florida State FFY 2016 State Performance Annual Report Plans

### **The Alignment of the Theoretical Framework**

From the analysis of the data, five constructs were aligned with the theoretical framework seen in Chapter 2: 1) professional development; 2) cultural experience; 3) cultural knowledge; 4) holistic practices; and 5) culturally relevant resources. These culturally responsive practices identified for both states were placed under the appropriate theoretical construct. Table 2 includes the culturally responsive practices aligned with the theoretical framework (Figure 1) seen in Chapter 2.

The researcher coded the data, identified patterns and categorized the evidence as it aligned to the theoretical framework. At the end of the coding, the evidence revealed specific

practices and were examined later for patterns and sorted into five categories. The five categories were examined for similarities, which were aligned with the theoretical framework in Chapter 2. Table 2 includes a description of each theoretical construct, category, and research connections used when implementing culturally responsive practices with RTI models to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education. Specific examples of culturally responsive language and culturally responsive practices from both school districts were previously included in Tables 3 and 5.

*Construct 1: Cultural Experience.* Multiple examples of evidence were identified in both states as using culturally responsive practices that aligned as the cultural experiences construct. Both school districts were involved in providing opportunities to collaborate with students and families as a way to bridge the connection between home and school relationships. When aligning with the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, the first construct for this discussion that was necessary for culturally responsive practices was cultural experience. The evidence identified under the cultural experience construct was analyzed for similarities and patterns. There was evidence of “caring” and “building relationships” with students and appropriate others such as leaders and additional staff (Gay, 2010). When the school districts were compared together, multiple examples of evidence addressed supporting students and teachers, ensuring culturally competent instruction, addressing disproportionate representation, and incorporating collaboration with family and external partners from the community, which also included colleges and universities. Providing wrap around services was added to the evidence and its ultimate goal was to improve educational outcomes. Lastly, with a focus on data-driven decision-making, the referral process for identifying priority students and families was considered a culturally responsive practice between the two school districts (Proctor et al., 2012).

Evidence of promoting the need to train stakeholders and provide necessary resources to increase the effectiveness of human capital was also deemed a culturally responsive practice.

*Construct 2: Cultural Knowledge.* A major underpinning for the construct of the cultural knowledge construct was to use the knowledge to impact multiple academic areas to improve student achievement, curriculum content, classroom management, and assessment (Hulan, 2015; Gay, 2010). Hulan (2015) strongly recommended the first step to learn how to connect curriculum to student's background was to gain knowledge about the student. Both school districts provided opportunities to strengthen the bridge between parent-teacher-student relationships (Allen & Steed, 2015; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). As previously discussed in Chapter 2, Allen and Steed (2015) found that developing this connection increased teacher awareness and improved ability to understand student behavior; thus, avoiding misinterpretations. The multidimensional aspect of the construct cultural knowledge considered initiatives that impacted academics, classroom management and relationships (Gay, 2010). Both school districts had evidence of initiatives valuing students and families learning about each other's culture and background (Gay, 2010).

*Construct 3: Cultural Relevant Resources.* Culturally relevant resources included both instructional materials and hiring of appropriate staff to increase student learning and help students become productive citizens. The culturally relevant resources used by both districts were intended to boost morale, develop character to support achievement, and to celebrate academic and behavioral accomplishments (Gay, 2010). Both school districts also provided a plethora of activities that promoted improvement in reading and mathematics. Research supported previously that many aspects of culturally responsive practices could be addressed with a core reading program (Toppo, 2015). Evidence of core reading programs support student

achievement (Topple, 2015). Having an appreciation for diversity and evidenced-based learning was another characteristic that was revealed by the researcher and aligned with the framework. Culturally responsive language was also identified in the practices that aligned with the theme of culturally relevant resources. Culturally responsive language, which included the acknowledgement that instructional materials would be culturally and developmentally appropriate and that additional staff would be hired and trained to deliver culturally responsive practices were aligned as a culturally relevant resource.

*Construct 4: Holistic Practices.* Research recommended culturally relevant pedagogy to be used, holistically, to instruct African American students (Proctor et al., 2012). To examine this, evidence categorized as holistic practices was collected from multiple documents. Proctor et al. (2012) discussed that holistic practices that addressed students' academic, cultural, and emotional well-being should be considered for African Americans. The content analysis revealed that both school districts included activities that focused on students' academic, cultural, and emotional wellbeing while implementing culturally responsive practices with a response to intervention framework to reduce disproportionate representation among African Americans in special education. This complexity of elements, which fell within the construct of holistic practices, also aligned with the descriptor from the framework, multidimensional.

Ladson-Billings (1997) discussed that students who identified with the hip-hop culture could be perceived as not having cultural capital for academic success. Klingner and Edwards (2006) discussed that schools were responsible for keeping parents informed about opportunities to increase their child's cultural capital. Adding support to the aforementioned research, the content analysis process of this study revealed that both school districts made training opportunities and resources available for parents to use at home with their children. Also,

holistic practices, which connected prior experiences and incorporated wrap around services for children and families, were provided in each school district. As this support continued to be examined, the major underpinnings of holistic practices extended beyond collecting background information about students and families to make instructional decisions and included teachers, schools, support personnel and community agency personnel in both school districts.

*Construct 5: Professional Development.* The final construct to be discussed included professional development. Multiple examples of evidence supporting opportunities to build employees' capacity to use culturally responsive practices were identified through the professional development activities offered by Pinellas County Schools, Florida and Arlington County Schools, Virginia. In both school districts, opportunities, which indicated employees received training when expected to implement a new initiative were highlighted. Another similarity regarding the professional development opportunities was that it was ongoing as recommended in previous research conducted by Finch (2012) and Garcia and Ortiz (2006). Moreover, Finch (2012) reiterated the importance of schools avoiding the train and hope for generalization approach and continuously providing learning opportunities for staff development. According to Finch (2012), ongoing professional development ensured teachers and leaders received consistent instructional support. The professional development offered by the two school districts also ensured that professional development increased the capacity of how to provide high quality instruction; and the professional development also focused on teachers and school leaders receiving support in activities and training to work with parents and students (Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Chapter 2 discussed the appreciation of families when teachers work toward building collaborative and culturally respectful relationships (Harry &



Klinger, 2006). Lastly, each school district also addressed equity, diversity, and biases through professional development opportunities available for teachers and leaders.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the results of this study, which included a qualitative analysis of public documents, state documents, disseminated information, district manuals, and flexibility requests submitted to the federal government by two states, Florida and Virginia, to identify culturally responsive practices used with RTI frameworks to reduce disproportionate representation of African American students in special education. Five theoretical constructs were aligned to the theoretical framework from the literature review and the data collected revealed multiple examples of evidence of culturally responsive practices used in both states. The five constructs included: 1) cultural experience; 2) cultural knowledge; 3) culturally relevant resources; 4) holistic practices; and 5) professional development. Using the data collected, the three research questions were answered. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and presents the researcher's conclusions and implications for further research and recommendations.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

This is the concluding chapter of this five-chapter research study entitled *Building a case for culturally responsive practices used with response to intervention models to reduce disproportionate representation among African Americans in special education*. The first chapter introduced the study and the problem. The second chapter reviewed relevant literature related to special education laws, disproportionate representation of African American students in special education, and response to intervention. The third chapter explained the research methodology. The fourth chapter expounded on the findings of the research study. The fifth chapter will include the summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

#### **Overview of the Problem**

Research has proven that disproportionate representation of minorities in special education has remained an ongoing challenge (Proctor et al., 2012). Due to this challenge, in 1991, the federal government was cited for recognizing the need to increase student success in education among minorities in special education (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). As a result, reauthorizations to IDEA required states to collect data and monitor disproportionate representation, identify criteria to reduce disproportionality in special education, and utilize additional methods to determine eligibility for special education services (Coutinho & Oswald, 2000). Thus, the implementation of RTI models in school districts across the nation. However,

with the ongoing reauthorizations of IDEA, African American students are still disproportionately represented in special education.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Although research may have shown RTI has the potential to reduce disproportionality among culturally and linguistically diverse students, studies have indicated African American students may still be overrepresented in special education (Proctor et al., 2012). To address this issue of disproportionate representation among African American students referred and placed in special education, a culturally responsive approach to intervention has gained popular acceptance among policymakers, practitioners, and parents. However, such an approach has not been systematically examined for effectiveness in reducing disproportionality among African American students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was three-fold:

- To identify the culturally responsive practices used with RTI models to reduce disproportionality among African Americans in special education in Pinellas County Schools in FL and Arlington Public Schools in VA.
- To identify the shared practices between the two school districts.
- To determine the relevant factors that are used to determine disproportionate representation.

### **Review of Methodology**

In this study, the researcher used content analysis to develop a consensus on the knowledge and use of culturally responsive practices aligned with RTI frameworks to decrease disproportionate representation in special education among African American students in Florida and Virginia. The content analysis was used to determine the presence of specific language in texts or sets of texts. According to Busch et al. (2012), content analysis is used to determine the

presence of specific language in text or sets of text. This study consisted of a review of texts, which promoted the use of culturally responsive language aligned with RTI models. The text for this study existed broadly in the forms of public documents, federal documents, state documents, and disseminated materials. Text was coded or broken down into various categories that relate to a word, word phrase, sentence, or theme (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Specific procedures for coding during the conceptual analysis phase of the study included: 1) deciding the level of analysis, how many concepts to code for and whether to code for existence or frequency of the concept; 2) deciding how to distinguish among concepts, develop rules for coding the text; and 3) deciding what to do with irrelevant information and analyze the results. The theoretical framework encompassed experts' contributions to the field of culturally responsive pedagogy with a word or word phrase germane to the foci of the work related to the field presented by the researchers.

This study was based on analysis across two states, Florida and Virginia. The researcher identified similarities carefully examining the culturally responsive practices used with RTI frameworks to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education. Each state was analyzed separately while maintaining continuity along the continuum of analytic styles by Marshall and Rossman (1989) ranging from technical/quasi-statistical and immersion/crystallization as referenced by McMillan & Schumacher (2010). The researcher developed a framework, CRP-RTI Model, grounded in five theoretical constructs. The descriptions within the theoretical framework synergized experts' contributions to the field of culturally responsive pedagogy with a word or word phrase. The researcher also developed familiarity with the two states and their culturally responsive education systems before entering the analysis phase and established a data collection effort that supported prolonged engagement.

Using a recursive process of constant comparison to discover patterns, the researcher then highlighted phrases, sentences or entire paragraphs from policy documents and reports to indicate whether they fell under a specific concept or category (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher highlighted phrases, sentences or entire paragraphs from policy documents and reports to indicate whether they fell under a specific theme or category. Once a highlighted area or component was indicated, it was aligned with the appropriate category. In instances where statements from policy documents fell under more than one construct, the statement was coded multiples times and organized in a clear format. The culturally responsive practices were then sorted into categories and aligned with the theoretical framework.

### **Review of Findings**

As a result of the content analysis, the culturally responsive practices used in both states aligned with the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. The five constructs included: 1) cultural experience; 2) cultural knowledge; 3) holistic practices; 4) culturally relevant resources; and 5) professional development. Findings from the study captured the essence of two states' culturally responsive efforts to reduce disproportionate representation as well as shared practices between the two states. The study also identified what was necessary for stakeholders when implementing culturally responsive practices. Lastly, the findings revealed specific criteria that both school districts used to determine disproportionate representation among African American students in special education.

### **General Discussion**

This chapter provides a discussion about the findings related to the three research questions that addressed the culturally responsive practices used with RTI frameworks to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education. The

three research questions guided the study. The questions and the findings are included in the following section.

The researcher identified common theoretical constructs through the identification of culturally responsive practices used with RTI models to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education. A plethora of research was used and synthesized as a theoretical framework to guide the alignment of culturally responsive practices identified in both states. The constructs revealed that culturally responsive practices valued funds of knowledge; valued cultural experiences that bridged the relationship between home and school with an alignment of school content and school climate; addressed students social-emotional, academic, and cultural well-being and training; and included resources that supported student achievement and provided professional learning that supported changes in teacher practices. These findings are in alignment with previous work completed by Gay (2010), Ladson-Billings (1997), Hammond and Gardner (2017), and Klingner and Edwards (2006). The identified school practices aligned to one of the five constructs identified in the theoretical framework needed to implement culturally responsive practices with a response to intervention framework for African American students in special education in Pinellas County Schools and Arlington County Schools (Proctor et al., 2012; Klingner & Edwards, 2006).

*Construct Cultural Experience.* Culturally responsive practices aligned with the cultural experience construct were demonstrated through staff having the appreciation of students' funds of knowledge to gain understanding about students' family cultural background and to make preparations to align instruction, with students' interest (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Gay, 2010). Other culturally responsive practices that aligned with the theoretical framework as cultural experience included the following areas: building family relationships, programs, addressing

disproportionate representation, collaboration, and problem solving. Each practice used in schools would require teachers, leaders, and staff to understand the need to acknowledge various students experiences within classroom instruction (Gay, 2010). Ortiz and Garcia (2006) believed that to have better curricula and instruction, schools needed to provide opportunities that built on students' cultural experiences. As a result of this finding, evidence such as incorporating the use of multi-tiered systems and redesigning Tier 3 instruction as highlighted in the Florida ESEA Flexibility Report (2012) were also categorized into the cultural experience construct (Proctor et al., 2012).

Key practices of both school districts included in this discussion provided specific examples that were used in Pinellas County Schools and Arlington County Schools. Specific culturally responsive practices included: 1) culturally responsive math and language arts instruction; 2) summer bridge programs; 3) STEM academies in Title I schools; 4) providing wrap around services for families at no cost; 5) restorative practices; and 6) monitoring dominant and non-dominant cultural patterns. For the purpose of this study, these practices were aligned as experiences that valued students' funds of knowledge (Gay, 2010). These culturally responsive practices also aligned to the research of Ortiz and Garcia (2006) and Ladson-Billing (1997) who discussed the necessity for schools to provide opportunities that build on students' cultural experiences. This highly recommended evidence aligned curriculum with students' backgrounds to gain knowledge about the student.

*Construct Cultural Knowledge.* Culturally responsive practices aligned as the culturally knowledge construct were designed to use the knowledge gained to impact multiple academic areas to improve student achievement, curriculum content, classroom management and assessment (Hulan, 2015; Gay, 2010). As previously discussed, Allen and Steed (2015)

supported practices that developed this connection to increase teacher awareness and improve ability to understand student behavior, thus, avoiding misinterpretations. The multi-dimensional aspect of the cultural knowledge construct considered initiatives that impacted academics, classroom management and relationships which was supported by (Gay, 2010).

*Construct Holistic Practices.* Evidence revealed opportunities for teachers, staff, and leaders in either school district to increase their understanding and knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds, align instruction to meet his or needs as well as impact others in a positive way with the culturally responsive practices that aligned with holistic practices. These findings were supported by the research conducted by Allen and Steed (2016). Additional findings included: "evidence-based instruction and intervention that reflect student diversity and result in learning opportunities for all students" and "develop a unique, instructional model that provides for planning, differentiation, academic rigor and enrichment." The findings further aligned with the theoretical framework in that both school districts addressed the need for teachers, leaders, and staff to be engaged with culturally responsive practices to increase academic outcomes and build social awareness of students (Ladson- Billings, 1997).

*Construct Culturally Relevant Practices.* Resources that supported the inclusion of students' cultural backgrounds to be used with classroom instruction were aligned as culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1997). The acknowledgement of ensuring culturally relevant resources was identified in placing evidence in this category. Lastly, specific culturally responsive practices used by a school district incorporating a culturally responsive checklist for people who work with children and both school districts acknowledging culturally responsive math and language arts instructions were aligned (Toppel, 2015).

*Construct Professional Development.* Culturally responsive practices aligned as



professional development included specific culturally responsive language. Professional development opportunities were designed for teachers, staff, and families. Klingner and Edwards (2006) researched discussed that schools were responsible in assisting parents with increasing their student cultural capital and professional development for families in both school districts aligned with theoretical framework. Providing culturally responsive professional development was needed to increase cultural capital in African American students, which in turn would produce positive outcomes in student achievement. Professional development opportunities included opportunities to build cultural competence, which was used to appropriately incorporate the use of culturally responsive practices according to the Cultural Competence manual used by Arlington Schools. Shared practices of building cultural competence was evident in both school districts (Gay, 2010 & Ladson-Billings, 1995). Cultural competence was viewed separately from culturally responsive practices. However, it was the understanding of both school districts to build the capacity of teachers, leaders, and staff who were expected to work with the students. Research conducted by Patton and Day-Vines (2009) promoted previously culturally competent schools that use the culture that students bring to school as a resource for teachers, leaders, and staff.

Each construct, culturally experiences, cultural knowledge, holistic practices, culturally relevant resources, and professional development, as seen previously in the theoretical framework, was found in both school districts. As discussed in Chapter 4, each school district had multiple examples of evidence that aligned with each construct and was used to implement culturally responsive practices with RTI frameworks to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education.

To identify the relevant factors in determining disproportionate representation, the researcher collected evidence on how to measure significant disproportionality for both states. A review of the Office of Special Education's Essential Questions and Answers (2017) document revealed that school districts were to monitor disproportionate representation. To expound further, the relevant factors were used to measure significant disproportionality based on race and ethnicity in special education with regards to identification, placement and discipline for all seven subgroups: 1) Hispanic/Latino of any race, and for individuals who are non-Hispanic/Latino only; 2) American Indian or Alaska Native; 3) Asian; 4) Black or African American; 5) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; 6) White; and 7) two or more races; as well as students with disabilities with particular impairments (USDOE, 2017). The analysis of the documents revealed that both states used a methodology for determining disproportionate representation, which included the following relevant factors: calculating a reasonable cell size, calculating a reasonable minimum N-size to determine the risk ratio for the purposes of establishing a threshold. However, the specific thresholds varied between the states.

Florida established a risk ratio of 3.5 or higher to identify disproportionate representation. The state used Westat's Risk Ratio for calculating disproportionate representation (Skiba et al, . The minimum N-size was 30. If the number of students in a specific subgroup category was less than 30, the calculation was not completed. Indicator 10: Disproportionate Representation in Specific Disability Categories FFY 2016 Data revealed that between the years 2004 and 2015, Florida indicated over-representation in 2009.

Indicator 10: Disproportionate Representation in Specific Disability Categories FFY 2016 Data revealed that The Virginia Department of Education identified a two-step analysis in determining disproportionate representation that was a result of inappropriate identification in

special education and related services among subgroups of students. The 2016 data also revealed that during the Level I analysis, a risk ratio of 2.0 or higher was applied to division level data to identify what was representative of disproportionate representation. As the analysis continued, the data revealed that Virginia's methodology for calculating risk ratios consisted of a minimum cell size of 10 (numerator) and minimum N-size of 10 (denominator). An alternate risk ratio was calculated in cases where the comparison group (all other racial or ethnic groups within the district) did not meet the established minimum cell size/minimum N-size. If the number of students in a specific subgroup category was less than 30, the calculation was not completed. Level II analysis required districts to complete a records review of individual student records for racial and ethnic groups identified in the Level I analysis. The FFY 2016 State Performance report indicated that between the years 2004-2015, Virginia indicated disproportionate representation in specific disability categories in 2005, 2014, and 2015.

The answer to the overarching question regarding whether culturally responsive practices used with RTI models reduced disproportionate representation among African American students in special education, led the researcher to the overall answer. Yes, culturally responsive practices can be used to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education. The overarching question was used to develop three sub-questions. Two of the sub-questions led the researcher to identify specific culturally responsive practices that could be used to reduce disproportionate representation among African American students in special education. These areas aligned with the five theoretical constructs that were embedded in the theoretical framework. Lastly, one research question identified the methodology used to determine disproportionate representation among subgroups of students in each state.

## **Summary**

Specific culturally responsive language and practices were used in both school districts. The process of constant comparison to discover patterns provided the researcher with a method for capturing the data and identified specific practices that used the terms, culturally responsive, culturally competent, and culturally relevant. As a result of the data coding, the practices were sorted according to data source and school district. The researcher highlighted phrases, sentences or entire paragraphs from policy documents and reports to indicate whether they fell under a specific concept or category. The practices were color coded by concept or category and aligned with the theoretical framework. Practices that fell under more than one construct were color coded multiple times.

## **Lessons Learned from the Study**

*Implications for Practice.* The study holds a number of implications for practice. It is the belief of the researcher that school leaders can use these practices in a holistic manner to reduce disproportionate representation. Examining these approaches as a culturally responsive education system, school leaders should incorporate various components that produce positive learning outcomes. While the five key constructs overlap, various approaches from each should be utilized to impact multiple areas when working with African American students. To better meet the needs of minority students, leaders in schools have to identify the different cultural groups within their schools, disaggregate the data to identify the problem areas, and strategize to address the current conditions to impact change. Such problem-solving approaches have led to positive results in student outcomes.

To better serve and identify the needs of African American students, school leaders could use the results of this study to design culturally responsive checklists for employees who work

with children to impact multiple areas within school organizations. However, to increase buy in during the change process, individuals would need clear guidance and examples to follow to ensure integrity of implementation. A detailed list of characteristics and indicators would provide staff with a clear pathway to understand how to use culturally responsive practices. School Leaders could also use the results to inform professional development activities to ensure that staff is knowledgeable about cultural responsiveness. To further meet the needs of students, school leaders could utilize the results of this study to develop professional development plans to address culturally relevant practices and appropriate strategies to build cultural competence, as teachers cannot be expected to use such practices and strategies without the proper training (Hammond et. al, 2017). Lastly, school districts should consider redesigning curriculum to include specific culturally responsive practices to be used in reading and math instruction.

The school districts chosen for the study demonstrated effective ways to train and develop teachers, staff, and parents and to also, collaborate with external partners to assist with providing training opportunities. When this understanding is developed, teachers are more supportive with students from diverse backgrounds and positive learning outcomes can occur.

## **Conclusion**

This study attempted to synthesize culturally responsive practices between two different schools in two different states as a guide for schools to incorporate culturally responsive practices to reduce African American placement in special education. As a result of the multiple reauthorizations of IDEA, African American students continued to be significantly disproportionately represented when compared to other subgroups (Proctor et al., 2012; Albrecht et al., 2012). Although the federal government recognizes the need for opportunities to improve,

additional ongoing measures must be taken to ensure all students receive fair and equitable treatment regardless of race, color, or creed (Albrecht et al., 2012).

Culturally responsive practices aligned with a RTI framework are needed for students of color to achieve academic success (Proctor et al., 2012; Albrecht et al., 2012). School districts should provide opportunities to build capacity of stakeholders and build a community of learners in order to impact change in the organization. These findings are consistent with the theoretical framework discussed by Green (2013) in the literature review. Findings from this study suggest individual schools should be monitored for alignment while implementing culturally responsive practices, providing ongoing learning, and refining instructional practices. This finding is also supported by Green (2013) and discussed in Chapter 2. Based on the findings for this study, there are at least five constructs, which are critical for implementing culturally responsive practices. These constructs are as follows: 1) cultural experiences; 2) cultural knowledge; 3) holistic practices; 4) culturally relevant resources; and 5) professional development. To fully embrace culturally responsive environments with diverse groups, schools must participate in race discussions. As discussed by Ladson-Billings (1997), “thinking of race strictly as an ideological concept denies the reality of a racialized society and its impact on people in their everyday lives” (p. 9). Thus, both school districts demonstrated that culturally responsive practices may be used with teachers and leaders as well, not just students.

Currently, states determine the criteria for determining significant disproportionality (IDEA, 2019). However, for consistency, the federal government should clearly define significant disproportionality and discuss alternative methods to determine disproportionality (Albrecht et al. 2012). Research included in the theoretical framework and within the literature review detailed the complexities of implementing culturally responsive practices and the

constructs needed for state, district, and local schools to experience success in decreasing disproportionality (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Toppel, 2015; Harris-Murri et al., 2006).

### **Implications for Future Research**

In reviewing and considering the results of this study, the following implications for future research were identified:

1. Disseminating statewide surveys to identify specific culturally responsive practices that special education and general education teachers use with African American students. Results of this research could increase participants' understanding of statewide culturally responsive practices. Further, instructional support could be established with ongoing collaboration across the state in using effective culturally responsive practices.
2. Disseminating statewide surveys to identify types of professional development offerings that are most effective.
3. Increasing the number of participating states could impact nationwide change.
4. Using focus groups, conduct interviews with state and district representatives to collect data and gather additional information that is not publicly available via the web. This approach could enhance the data collection process and methods used to analyze the documents and increase participants' understanding of statewide culturally responsive practices. Additionally, instructional support regarding the use of effective culturally responsive practices and ongoing collaboration could be established across the state.
5. Using focus groups, conduct interviews with multiple states that use different relevant factors in determining disproportionate representation among minorities.

6. Conduct classroom observations to collect evidence of culturally responsive practices used with diverse groups of students.
7. Conduct fidelity studies to determine the extent of consistent implementation of culturally responsive practices used with RTI models.
8. Conduct classroom observations to provide real time data, which are not accessible from web accessible documents.
9. Conduct a study including a focus on implementing culturally responsive practices used to impact behavior and discipline data in a positive manner.
10. Include research on the underrepresentation of minorities in special education to ensure fair and equitable monitoring and data collection practices are in place for all minorities including African Americans.



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APPENDIX A



Institutional Review Board  
Office of Sponsored Programs  
University of Memphis  
315 Admin Bldg  
Memphis, TN 38152-3370

Mar 28, 2017

PI Name: Sonia Barber

Co-Investigators:

Advisor and/or Co-PI: Reginald Green

Submission Type: Admin Withdrawal

Title: "An analysis of the effects of culturally responsive practices on the placement of African-American students in special education"

IRB ID: PRO-FY2017-449

From the information provided on your determination review request for “An analysis of the effects of culturally responsive practices on the placement of African- American students in special education”, the IRB has determined that your activity does not meet the Office of Human Subjects Research Protections definition of human subjects research and 45 CFR part 46 does not apply.

This study does not require IRB approval nor review. Your determination will be administratively withdrawn from Cayuse IRB and you will receive an email similar to this correspondence from [irb@memphis.edu](mailto:irb@memphis.edu). This submission will be archived in Cayuse IRB.

THANKS,  
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