NARRATIVES OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION EXPEREINCE IN PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY: UNHEARD VOICES OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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By

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ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Narratives of the Special Education Experience in Preschool and Elementary: Unheard Voices of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Parents of Children with Disabilities

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Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth with disabilities may face a plethora of problems as they transition through school (i.e., teacher bias; inequitable discipline compared to White peers; over and under identification in special education, etc.). A limited number of studies focus on the experiences and perspectives of parents/caregivers of youth in the primary grades let alone those with disabilities from CLD backgrounds. Focusing on the experiences of parents and their children in the early grades will inevitably provide an understanding of how these barriers impact the trajectory of CLD students with disabilities (Harry, 2008).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of CLD parents of students with disabilities on the child and parental experience with educators during the preschool and elementary grades (pre-K through fifth grade). Qualitative methods, specifically narrative inquiry, was used to gain in-depth knowledge of the parental perspective in order to elucidate the challenges, barriers, and successes faced by these parents and their children. Multiple methods of collecting data (i.e., narrative interviews, focus groups, and journal

prompts) were used to gain a deeper understanding of participants' journey through the special education process (Stake, 2010).

Data from 13 participants were highlighted and analyzed. Findings revealed several emergent themes: (1) educators need to develop cultural competence to improve relationships with CLD students and their parents; (2) educators need to improve engagement and partnership in the special education process; and (3) educators and parents need to enhance their knowledge of the special education process.

Findings indicate that navigating the special education process was at times frustrating for participants during their journey. Barriers included cultural misunderstandings between staff, students, and parents; lack of communication about the special education process; and inadequate service delivery. Overall, participants were left with unanswered questions regarding their child's needs, services, and progress. This study has implications for policymakers, educators, service providers, and parents of children with disabilities who seek to improve parental engagement and equalizing partnerships for improved student outcomes.

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From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.
Luke 12:48 New International Version (NIV)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

The population of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in United States (U.S.) schools is increasing at an enormous rate (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Brown- Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Ford, Whiting, Goings, & Robinson, 2017). Statistics show that racial minority groups are outnumbering White students in public schools (McFarland, 2017). According to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), less than 50% of U.S. students attending public schools in 2017 were White (2017). Out of 50.7 million U.S. students in grades pre-K through 12th grade, 26.3 million were racial minorities, with Black (8.0 million) and Hispanic (13.6 million) students representing the highest population of racial minorities (McFarland, 2017). For the purposes of this study, CLD will be used to refer to diverse cultural, racial, ethnic and/or linguistic groups to include: (a) Black/African American or Hispanic; and (b) English language learners (ELLs) or native language English speakers (Klingner et al., 2005; Ford, 2012).

Not surprising, the percentage of White students in U.S. public schools is expected to continue to decline, which implies that White students will become the minority in years to come. However, CLD students still make up a large population of students identified for special education services (McFarland, 2017). Approximately 6.1 million school-aged children living in the U.S. receive special education services and half of these students are considered racial minorities (Garraway & Robinson, 2017). As the demographics of U.S. public schools rapidly change, the number of CLD

students identified for special education, especially English learners, will continue to increase (Bethea & Stevenson, 2017; McDaniel, 2017). This has serious implications for how educators address the academic needs of Black and Hispanic students.

The U.S. teaching force continues to be comprised predominantly of White females, which cause some scholars to question their preparation (i.e., preservice and in-service professional development) to work effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Chu & Garcia, 2014; Gay, 2010; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Irvine & Armento, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Tran (2014) posits that White middle-class standards of educating students often comes along with prejudice and can negatively impact relationships with students and their families. Furthermore, Harry and Klinger (2006) in their seminal work on CLD students in special education found that at the school and classroom level, there was a lack of preparation of staff to work effectively with CLD children. If the aforementioned issues are left unaddressed, the outcomes for CLD youth will continue to look bleak (Ford et al., 2017; Garraway & Robinson, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth with disabilities may face a plethora of problems as they transition through school (i.e., lower teacher expectations; teacher bias; misdiagnosis; inequitable discipline compared to White peers, etc.). The aforementioned problems surrounding CLD youth with disabilities have been will cited, yet these issues have not been adequately addressed (Blanchett, 2010; Ford, 2012; Gay, 2010; Harry & Klinger, 2014; USDE, 2016). This is evident in the reported challenges and barriers that are known to negatively impact these students' outcomes (Harry & Klinger, 2006; Obiakor & Wilder, 2010). For instance, culturally and linguistically

diverse (CLD) youth with disabilities are more likely than their White peers to experience negative outcomes such as school dropout, lower enrollment in postsecondary institutions, and higher unemployment (Black, 2010; Garraway & Robinson, 2017). Scholars agree that immediate attention is needed to address the poor outcomes of CLD students with disabilities (Blanchett, 2010; Chu & Garcia, 2014; Ford, et al. 2017; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Musu-Gillette, 2017).

Improving outcomes of CLD youth with disabilities by including their parents as equal partners in the education process is a critical issue that scholars maintain deserves further attention and action (Harry, 2008; Jung, 2011; Tran, 2014; Turnbull et al., 2011). According to the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (IDEA 2004), educators are required to include parents in the special education process (Yell, 2016), but the literature reveals that CLD parents may be withdrawn and feel marginalized (Brandon & Brown, 2009; Jung, 2011). Lack of parental involvement in the IEP process may be a result of barriers (i.e., poor home-school relationships; lack of understanding of the IEP process, etc.) that can negatively impact students' academic success (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Tran, 2014). In an effort to improve outcomes for CLD youth, educators and service providers will need to develop cultural competence that entails knowing and understanding students and their families, and a commitment to continuous reflection of attitudes and practices (Cross, 1989; Ford & Whiting, 2007; Gay, 2010, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995; NASW, 2016). Furthermore, scholars stress the importance of educational leaders fostering positive relationships between staff, students, and their families (Epstein, 1995; Turnbull et al., 2011; Stefanski, Valli & Jacobson, 2016).

Issues of Culture, Language, and Disability. The discrimination of CLD youth in education is blatantly evident (Blanchett, 2010; Ford, 2012; Irvine, 2012; USDE, 2016). In December of 2016, the U.S. Department of Education released regulations regarding equitable practices involving students of color in special education:

> All children who require special education services should be appropriately identified and supported. At the same time no child should be inappropriately identified for special education services, separated from his or her peers, or disciplined more frequently or harshly simply because they are a student of color with a disability. These regulations will help ensure that the promise of IDEA is fulfilled without regard to race or ethnicity (USDE, 2016, p. 1).

This implies that culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students are at increased risk for misidentification in special education due to the racism and inequities that still exists in U.S. schools (Ford, 2012; Ford et al., 2017).

Scholars concede that inappropriate diagnosis of CLD youth often occurs as a result of teacher bias and a lack of understanding of students' culture and language (Artiles, Dorn, & Bal, 2016; Blanchett, 2014; Irvine, 2012; Owens, Ford, Lisbon & Owens, 2016). There are, however, some CLD students who in fact may benefit from special education services and are not identified. For instance, there is emerging research on parents of CLD students who face challenges advocating and obtaining special education services for their children (Francis et al., 2017; Garraway, 2017; Stanley, 2015; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015). This is a critical issue that needs further exploration (Garraway, 2017; McDaniel, 2017; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents of students with disabilities on the child and parental experience during preschool (pre-K) and elementary school (K -5). The goal of this study was to elucidate the challenges, barriers, and successes faced by these parents and their children. Focusing on the experiences of parents and their children in the early grades will inevitably provide an understanding of how these barriers impact the trajectory of CLD students with disabilities. To adequately address the needs of CLD students and their parents, educators will need to identify their biases and work towards cultural competence (Cross, 1989; Gay, 2010). Scholars agree that educators and service providers often make judgments about the students they serve, their families, and their home life without considering the political, economic, and educational factors that contribute to their marginalization (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Owens et al., 2016; Jung, 2011). However, Boykin and Noguera (2011) argued that it is important that educators not use factors such as poverty, culture, race, etc. to justify why CLD students are not excelling at the same rate as their non-White peers. Although these factors may impact the academic and social-emotional well-being of CLD students, it is how educators perceive these students and what they are willing to do to address the issues, that impact their success (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Until schools focus on the interests, strengths, and needs of CLD students and their families, there will continue to be opportunity gaps, achievement gaps, and poor outcomes for CLD students (Allen, Davis, Garraway & Burt, 2018).

A limited number of studies focus on the experiences and perspectives of parents/caregivers of youth in the primary grades let alone those with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds (Wildinger & McIntyre, 2011). Parents know their children best, yet their voices often go unheard (Landmark et al., 2007; Miller-Warren, 2016; Stanley, 2015; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

This study looked through the lens of family engagement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2009; Lopez & Caspe, 2014; Maryland Family Engagement Coalition, 2016; Turnbull et al., 2011). "Family engagement is defined as goal-directed relationships between staff and families that are ongoing and culturally responsive, family and staff members share responsibility and mutually support what is best for children and families" (Stefanski et al., 2016, p. 139). Family engagement is more than participating in school activities (i.e., volunteering, PTA, etc.), but equitable collaboration and partnership between educators, students, and their parents (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Ferlazzo, 2011; Ferrel, 2012; Lopez & Caspe, 2014; Rossetti, Sauer, Bui & Ou, 2017). Family engagement has been correlated with positive student outcomes such as improved attendance and higher graduation rates (Ferrel, 2012; Garbacz et al., 2017; Henrich, 2013; Khalifa, 2012).

It is imperative that educators consider innovative ways to engage students and their families by building trusting relationships (Ferlazzo, 2011; Francis et al., 2017; Rossetti et al., 2017). Relationships built on trust are critical for students with disabilities and their parents, especially if students experience challenges in their transition through school (Harry, 2008; Ferrel, 2012; Rossetti et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2011). Family

engagement for *all* students is important and there is a great need for research focusing on the specific engagement needs of Black and Hispanic parents of students with disabilities (Harry, 2008; Jung, 2011; Stanley, 2015; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015). Three key tenets of family engagement: cultural competence (Cross, 1989; NASW, 2016), positive relationships (Francis et al., 2017; Harry, et al., 2009), and partnership (Epstein, 2009; Maryland Family Engagement Coalition, 2016; Turnbull et al., 2011) made up the conceptual framework for this study.

Cultural competence. Scholars in the field of family engagement are beginning to recognize the need for a greater focus on cultural competence to improve outcomes for students with disabilities (Garbacz et al., 2017; Ferrel 2012), but as previously presented, there is limited literature in this area. Cultural competence is an evolving process that involves the development of understanding and respect of diverse backgrounds and cultures (Cross, 1989; Gay, 2010). Cultural competence requires getting to know others, understanding oneself and others, and the development of attitudes, policies, and practices (Cross, 1989; Ford & Whiting, 2007; Gay, 2010; NASW, 2016).

Focusing on cultural competence provides a foundation for this study that values the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and their families and focuses on the necessity of building relationships between school, student, and the family. Previous research conducted by Cazden and Legget (1976) suggests that schools should honor and respect diversity and encourage school, family, and community engagement. Cazden and Leggett (1976) also suggest professional development, hiring educators from minority groups, and encouraging parental participation in school to

"bring the invisible culture of the community into the school" (p.1). Hence, there is a great need in the field of education for improving home-school relationships, family engagement, and educators' cultural competence (Khalifa, 2012).

In addition to Cazden and Legget's (1976) seminal research, other scholars (Gay, 2010, 2014; Irvine & Armeto, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2009; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) have stressed the need for educators to get to know the students they teach and engage them in ways that connect to their experiences, culture and learning styles. There are several frameworks that have been used as tools in research studies that focus on ways that educators can best meet CLD students' needs (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2009). Scholars Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009) emphasize several key principles that are imperative to improving student outcomes: (a) avoid stereotypes; (b) engage in discourse to open awareness; (c) foster a culture of caring; (d) implement a relevant multicultural curriculum; (e) provide culturally relevant instruction; and (f) strive to become culturally competent. The willingness of educators to improve their practice and strive towards cultural competence will require educators to engage in ongoing learning opportunities in an effort to build their capacity to work with all stakeholders (Cross, 1989; Gay, 2010).

Positive Relationships. A key to building strong relationships with students and their families is getting to know their interests, needs, and strengths (Francis et al., 2017; Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Harry, 2008). However, barriers to communication often exist between home and school due to a lack of understanding and respect for cultural differences (Francis, et al., 2017; Harry, 2008; Harry et al., 2009). These barriers impact relationships, which in turn can affect student's academics and social-emotional

wellbeing (Castro-Olivo, 2010; Garraway, 2017; Simmons, 2017; Wright et al., 2016). Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students are more often required to conform to the expectations of a school environment that may be different than what they are accustomed to (Blanchett, et al., 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Scholars agree that many educators often impose a White middle-class perspective on students without taking into consideration the uniqueness that each child brings, and the value diversity adds to the learning environment (Francis et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Tran, 2014). Furthermore, a lack of understanding and minimal effort in getting to know students and their families leads to biases and unfair treatment of CLD students with disabilities (Ford, 2012). It is imperative that educators learn to build relationships and improve communication with CLD parents and work to include them as partners in their child's education (Francis et al., 2017; Khalifa, 2012; Rosetti et al., 2017; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015).

Partnership. The changing demographics of U.S. schools is causing more scholars to focus on the need to engage parents of CLD students in their child's education. This also means that educators will need to be prepared to shift their thinking and include these parents as partners in the educational process (Rossetti, et al., 2017; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). This is especially important for CLD students with disabilities since their parents may not always have a clear understanding of the special education process and their role (Francis et al., 2017; Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Rossetti et al., 2017). School and family partnerships are critical to improving outcomes for children (Epstein, 2009; Khalifa, 2012; Rosetti et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2011), especially those with disabilities (Fish, 2008; Francis et al., 2017; Greene, 2014; Rossetti

et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2011). Epstein (2009) compares partnerships between school and home to a family environment. In the family environment students and their families should feel supported, respected, and welcome (Epstein et al., 2009; Turnbull et al., 2011). Epstein's (1995) theory of school, family, and community partnerships emphasized the importance of providing individualized attention to the unique needs of students and their families. Epstein (2009) considered partnerships as overlapping spheres of influence where both educators and parents work together to influence the outcomes of students. Consideration for planning programs and providing resources and supports requires creative strategies to reach families such as home visits (Khalifa, 2012; Wildinger & McIntyre, 2015); collaboration and partnership with the community (Epstein, 1995; Khalifa, 2012); collaborative problem solving (Rossetti et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2011); and equal partnerships and decision-making (Tran, 2014; Turnbull et al., 2011).

As previously mentioned, the goal of this study was to elucidate the challenges, barriers, and successes faced by culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities and their parents. The family engagement framework enables the researcher to consider family characteristics, unique circumstances, and interactions that impact their experiences with educators and other stakeholders within the school, family, and community. Furthermore, within the family engagement framework, considerations of culture, relationships, and partnerships are critical to improving outcomes for CLD students. This was consistent in the findings of the present study and has implications for family engagement practices of educators.

Research Questions

Qualitative methodology, specifically narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002; Kim, 2016; Piatanida & Garman, 2009) was utilized to collect and analyze data regarding the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families. Multiple methods of collecting data (i.e., interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts) were used to gain a deeper understanding of parental perspectives of their child's special education experience (Stake, 2010).

Narrative interviews (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002; Kim, 2016) were conducted with questions focused on cultural responsiveness, relationships, and partnerships. Data collected from interviews, focus groups, and journals were coded and analyzed to explore meaning and identify themes (Creswell, 2009; Kim, 2016; Saldana, 2015). Consistent with narrative mode of inquiry, findings in Chapter IV will be reported using pronouns (i.e. I, he, she, they, etc.). Writing in the first person allowed the researcher to clearly communicate the researcher's stance and justify claims (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Piatanida & Garman, 2009).

One research question with two sub-questions were explored in this study: What do the narratives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities tell about child and parental experiences with educators during the primary years?

1. What do these parents' stories reveal about student and family engagement practices at their child's school?
2. What can educators learn from culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities in order to improve cultural responsiveness?

The overarching research questions and sub-questions are aligned to the conceptual framework (see Figure 1).

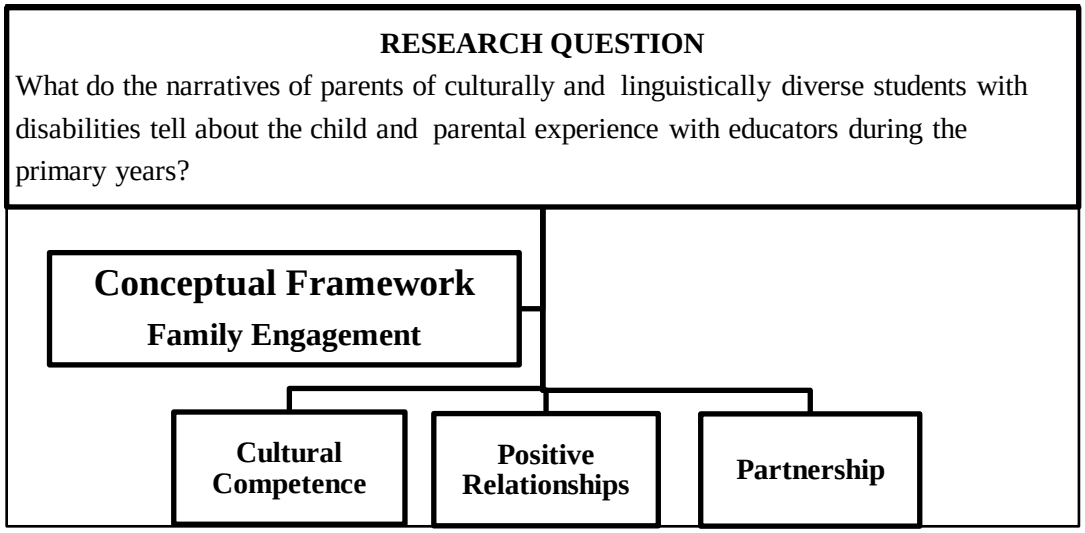

Figure 1. Conceptual framework (not adapted from any other source)

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitations of this study include the small sample size and educational setting. Thirteen parents of children with disabilities in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth participated in the study. Six parents were interviewed individually at least twice. The other parents participated in a focus group interview. The sample population was limited to parents or primary caregivers of children with disabilities that attended early learning centers, non-public/special schools for students with disabilities, and parents who were members of a parent organization (i.e., Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Permission from public schools that serve parents of children with disabilities was not sought for this study. The decision not to include public schools that may serve larger populations as opposed to smaller educational organizations may have been a limitation in terms of the number of interested participants.

Significance of the Study

The conducted study will make a significant contribution to elementary education, specifically on the issues that impact culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students receiving special education services in pre-K through fifth grade. The study will make a significant contribution to the field of education by providing essential data on how schools and service providers can identify and address barriers and challenges faced by parents of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities as they navigate the special education process. Although previous studies in special education have identified barriers that impact outcomes for CLD youth (Blanchett et al., 2009; Harry & Klinger, 2006; 2014), little analytic attention has been paid to qualitative inquiry that focuses on the parents' perspective. As such, this study provides additional insight into the experiences of CLD parents and their children with disabilities.

This study addressed the issue of engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse parents in the special education process. Research on students with disabilities indicates that early intervention is critical to improving outcomes for these youth (National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, 2017). This study explored the perspectives of CLD parents of students with disabilities on the child and parental experience during preschool (pre-K) and elementary school (K -5). Furthermore, the research that exists on children with disabilities does not provide a wealth of information on the parental perspective, let alone those from CLD backgrounds. In addition, quantitative methodology that is used in studies of children with disabilities does not always yield the results that capture the true experiences of students and their families (Harry, 2008). "The continuing difficulty in assessing the views of CLD parents in survey

research underscores the need for face-to-face qualitative research methods" (Harry, 2008, p. 375). This qualitative study using individual interviews, focus groups, and journal entries, enabled the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge on the experiences of CLD youth and their parents during the primary years. This study provided insight into the challenges, barriers, and needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students that often impacts their academic achievement and social-emotional wellbeing (Garraway, 2017). Prioritizing efforts and resources to improve outcomes for CLD students begins with educational school leaders (Garraway, 2017). The study provided data on the needs of CLD students and has implications for how school leaders determine the use of their human and financial capital. Results from this study may be used to inform the work of educators, special education advocates, and parents so that CLD students can experience successful outcomes.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study the following definitions will be used throughout the chapters:

1. *Culture: "*Refers to foundational values and beliefs that set the standards for how people perceive, interpret, and behave within their family, school, and community" (Turnbull et al., 2012, p. 8).
2. *Cultural competence*: Evolving process that involves the development of understanding and respect of diverse backgrounds and cultures (Bakken et al., 2011; Broussard, 2003; Cross, 1989; NASW, 2016; Tran, 2014).
3. *Cultural responsiveness:* Cultural responsiveness in school settings can be referred to as the reflection of one's biases, intentions, practices, and engagement

in ongoing learning opportunities in an effort to build cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Gay, 2010).

4. *Culturally and Linguistically Diverse* (CLD): For the purposes of this study, CLD refers to diverse cultural, racial, ethnic and/or linguistic groups to include: (a) Black/African American or Hispanic; and (b) English language learners (ELLs) or native language English speakers (Klingner et al., 2005; Ford, 2012).
5. *Diversity:* Individual or group uniqueness and/or differences - i.e., race, language, culture, etc. (NASW, 2016).
6. *Disproportionality:* Racial disparities in special education (or referral), specifically the over representation of Black and Hispanic students (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2016; Voulgarides, 2018).
7. *English Language Learners (ELL)*: Used interchangeably with EL or LEP-Limited English Proficient (McDaniel, 2017).
8. *Engagement:* Collaborative, supportive, and trusting interactions that promote participation and partnership *(*Garbacz, et al. 2017; Stefanski et al., 2016)
9. *Equity*: Justice according to natural law or right; *specifically*: freedom from bias or favoritism (Equity. (n.d.). Retrieved March 25, 2018, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/equity).
10. *Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)*: "The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children" (USDE, 2018. Retrieved from: https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/).

11. *Individualized Education Program (IEP)*: The IEP is a legal document that indicates the child's current levels of performance, measurable yearly goals and objectives, accommodations, and services (MSDE, 2009). Once a child is found eligible for special education services (under IDEA specified disability), the IEP team meets to develop a plan to address the needs of the child.
12. *Individualized Education Program Team (IEP team)*: The IEP team consists of parents/guardian, child (if appropriate), special educator, general educator, public agency representative (i.e., principal or designee), individual to interpret evaluation results (i.e., psychologist, speech pathologist, etc.) and service provider (if appropriate). These members work together to determine the goals of the IEP and services needed (MSDE, 2009).
13. *Narrative Inquiry:* Exploration and understanding of a specific human experience, perspective, and actions in response to life events as well as consequences. Narrative inquiry involves collaboration with participants while allowing them opportunities to relive their experiences and share their stories. Hence, narrative research is a recursive, cyclical process with an ongoing revelation of understanding(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016).
14. *Parent:* "A person who brings up and cares for another" ("Parent." Merriam-Webster.com, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/parent. Accessed 30 Apr. 2018). For the purposes of this study, "parent" refers to a birth parent or legal guardian/caretaker who the child lives with and makes educational decisions. Parent is considered an individual

who: (a) has legal custody; (b) has been granted kinship care status; or (c) is a foster parent.

Summary

This chapter provided background information on the changing demographics of the United States schools and the implications for schools serving culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and their parents. The purpose, significance, and limitations of the proposed study were discussed. A family engagement conceptual framework aligned with one overarching research question and two sub questions were described. Key terms relevant to the proposed study were defined. The following literature review will provide a synthesis of some of the key issues related to culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities and their parents as well as implications for educators.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Most of the literature reviewed on special education suggests that research focused on the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities is critical to unveiling barriers to student success (Artiles, Dorn, Bal, 2016; Blanchett, 2014; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Klingner & Harry, 2014). Peer-reviewed articles and books were explored using online research platforms and search engines (i.e., Ebsco, ProQuest, Google Scholar, etc.). Articles selected for review included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodology. Literature published between 2008-2018 was given priority consideration for review by the researcher. Other text that provided a historical context on the topic of interest was also reviewed. Key terms were used to search for text relevant to the study (i.e., family engagement; culturally responsiveness in special education; early childhood special education; African American parents and special education; Hispanic parents and special education, etc.). In addition, the researcher contacted several well-cited scholars in the field of special education, early childhood, family engagement, and narrative inquiry to seek clarity and to gain a deeper understanding of their research and to explore other references and resources relevant to the topic.

The current literature on CLD students with disabilities reveals several themes related to these students:

1. Race, Language, and Disability
2. Cultural Competence in Schools

3. Student and Parent Engagement

Building on the analysis of prior research, the following literature review will summarize the aforementioned critical issues related to CLD students with disabilities.

Overview of Special Education

Special Education Legislation. Prior to the 1970s, the majority of U.S. school-aged children with disabilities was excluded from public school or did not receive educational services that adequately met their needs (Artiles et al., 2016; Ashbaker, 2011; Blanchett, et al., 2009; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2011; Voulgarides, 2018; Yell, 2016). Several laws have been passed from 1965-2015 with the intent of improving educational opportunities for children with disabilities (Ashbaker, 2011; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2011; Yell, 2016).

The Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA, 1970) was the first "free standing" special education law that mandated the education of all students with disabilities (Yell, 2016, p. 41). The *Education Amendments of 1974* (amendments to *The Education of the Handicapped Act of 1970*) required states receiving federal funding to set goals that provided educational opportunities for all students with disabilities (Ashbaker, 2011). However, these laws were not fully enforced and many children with disabilities went without adequate educational services (Ashbaker, 2011; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2011; Voulgarides, 2018). The aforementioned laws appropriated funds to states to develop programs with the intent of improving educational opportunities for children with disabilities, but it was not until 1975 that the federal government increased its role in special education (Voulgarides, 2018; Yell, 2016).

In 1975, The *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EAHCA), was signed into law and is considered one of the most significant laws in special education (Ashbaker, 2011; Blanchett, Klinger, & Harry, 2009; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2011; Voulgarides, 2018; Yell, 2016). The *EAHCA* (1975), an amendment of the *Education of Handicapped Act* (1970), required compliance and set timelines for states to develop policies to ensure that students with disabilities be afforded free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (Ashbaker, 2011; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2011; Yell, 2013). The *EAHCA* (1975), was renamed the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) in 1990 (Yell, 2016).

Since 1975, there have been many changes in the legislation that impacts the rights of students with disabilities and the services they receive. For instance, the *IDEA Amendments of 1997* added discipline requirements and expanded due process procedures (i.e., to afford mediation to parents prior to a due process hearing). In addition, legislation in the 2000s (i.e., *No Child Left Behind Act*, 2001) focused more on accountability to ensure that students receiving special education services had not only access, but also a quality education to meet their needs (Artiles et al., 2016; Ashbaker, 2011; Yell, 2017). *The Individual with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA, 2004) required states to develop State Performance Plans (SPP) to collect data, provide measurable targets, and develop goals to improve schools' performance (Ashbaker, 2011; Yell, 2017). In 2015, The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) was signed into law and provided additional regulations to ensure the engagement of invested stakeholders, including parents, in their child's education.

Race, Language, and Disability. Prior to the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act* (EACHA, 1975), advocates of special education rode on the coattails of those who fought for the desegregation of public schools, specifically citing the landmark civil rights case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and arguing that children with disabilities had the same right to a free public education (Ashbaker, 2011; Blanchett, Klinger, & Harry, 2009; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2011; Voulgarides, 2018; Yell, 2016). Although to some, the *Education of Handicapped Act* (*EHA*, 1970) was a victory for children with disabilities, other scholars argue that after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) case, school systems were able to mask their efforts to 're-segregate' students of color (Blanchett, 2014; Blanchett et al., 2009; Voulgarides, 2018).

The *EAHCA* (1975) mandates that students with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to ensure they are educated with their non-disabled peers to the fullest extent possible (Ashbaker, 2011; Yell, 2016). As previously mentioned, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth with disabilities continue to experience greater isolation and discrimination not only because of their disability, but because of the color of their skin, language, and culture (Artiles et al., 2016; Blanchett, 2010; Ferri et al., 2016; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Irvine, 2012). "This layered marginalization not only infringes upon the human rights of young people, but also has negative effects on the cohesion and stability of the societies in which they live" (USDE, 2016, p. 6). The issue of race, language, and disability is a critical issue that demands continuous attention until all students experience improved outcomes (Ferri et al., 2016; Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Voulgarides, 2018).

Disproportionality is considered racial disparities in special education (or referral), specifically the over representation of Black and Hispanic students (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2016; Voulgarides, 2018). The issue of disproportionality in special education is not new. In fact, for centuries, advocates in the field of special education have been fighting the same battle to obtain equity in educational practices for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children (Artiles et al., 2016; Blanchett, 2010; Ferri, et al., 2016 Ford, 2012; Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2011). Salend and Garrick-Duhaney (2011) conceded that society has played a major role in marginalizing CLD students. They asserted that biases and prejudice based on race, language, culture, and socioeconomic status has led to disproportionality in special education (Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 2011). This is especially true for Black students who are more likely to be placed in high incidence disability categories such as learning disabilities and emotional disabilities (Artiles et al., 2016; Blanchett, 2010; Sullivan & Bal, 2013). Disproportionality in special education is a critical issue that continues to be researched, but until there is consistent change from the federal down to the classroom level, the outcomes for CLD students with disabilities will continue to be disheartening (Garraway & Robinson, 2017).

Current research continues to show that CLD students are at greater risk for special education identification compared to their white peers (Artiles et al., 2016; Ferri, Annamma, & Connor, 2016; Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Voulgarides, 2018). The problem of racial disparities in special education is such a critical issue that the U.S. Department of education released The *Equity in IDEA Fact Sheet* in December of 2016 (USDE, 2016) to summarize regulations regarding equitable practices involving students of color with

disabilities. The aforementioned document addresses issues of race/ ethnicity and the disparity in discipline of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students compared to their White peers who commit similar offenses. In addition, issues related to special education identification (under and over representation) of students of color are discussed in the fact sheet (USDE, 2016). Furthermore, states were required to address inequities and identify school districts with "significant disproportionality". The new regulation indicated a change in funds for schools to support students with disabilities, including those in preschool.

Special education can be beneficial for those students who qualify and actually need it (Ashbaker, 2011; Garraway, 2017; Voulgarides, 2018). However, scholars caution that teacher bias, lack of cultural responsiveness, and low expectations of students can ultimately impact outcomes for CLD youth (Ferri et al., 2016; Ford, et al., 2017; Harry & Klinger, 2006, 20014; Voulgarides, 2018). There are approximately 51 million students enrolled in U.S. public schools of which Black (8.0 million) and Hispanic (13.6 million) students represent the highest population of racial minorities (McFarland, 2017; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Over 3.1 million CLD students receive special educations services and as the demographics of U.S. schools change, the number of CLD students identified for special education will continue to increase (Bethea & Stevenson, 2017; Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Sullivan & Bal, 2013).

Scholars agree that language barriers of some CLD students may be mistaken for a learning disability (Ford, 2012; Harry, 2008; Klingner & Harry, 2006). Yet, there are some English language learners who may qualify for special education services, but are not referred because lack of language is thought to be the reason for poor academic

performance (Bethea, 2017; Klingner & Harry, 2006; McDaniel, 2017). Special education teams are tasked with determining whether students qualify for special education services, but may lack the necessary skills to adequately do so (Flannery & Hellemn, 2015; Klinger & Harry, 2006; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015).

Klingner and Harry (2006) examined the referral and decision-making process of special education teams working with struggling English language learners (Haitian, Hispanic and Middle Eastern). Some of the special education team members interviewed in their study indicated that they were reluctant to test English language learners (ELLs) because they received mixed messages from their school district about the language proficiency required before a child could be referred (i.e., lower levels could not be referred). When making decisions about whether students qualified for special education, there was little to know discussion about their academic ability in their native language.

Steeley and Lukacs (2015) also found similar issues in their case study of a Hispanic mother's experience with her child's IEP team. Barriers related to language and cultural misunderstanding existed (i.e., members of team asking mom not to speak Spanish to child) to the point that the family moved to a new school district to obtain a better education for their son. The participant reported feeling unheard, a lack of trust, and isolated from the school team. The aforementioned studies have implications for how special education teams are trained and prepared to make ethical decisions related to the special education process.

Artiles et al. (2016) posit that there are reasons that warrant students being referred for special education services, but the critical issue that is yet to be satisfactorily addressed by schools servicing culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students is the

legitimacy of the referrals (Artiles et al., 2016; Harry & Klingner, 2008; 2014; Voulgarides, 2018). "This concept of adequate opportunity to learn is a fundamental aspect of the definition of learning disabilities as part of its exclusionary clause; when a child has not had sufficient opportunity to learn, the determination cannot be made that she has a learning disability" (Klingner & Harry, 2006, p. 2249). Thus, student and family culture, background, needs, and potential barriers to success should be considered before referring a child for special education (Artiles et al., 2016; Bethea, 2017; Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Sullivan & Bal, 2013). Furthermore, special education teams could benefit from professional development on, language acquisition, quality individualized education program, and cultural competence (Klinger & Harry, 2006).

Cultural Competence in Schools

Effectively addressing issues of disproportionality requires more than federal mandates (Artiles et al., 2016; Ferri et al., 2016; Tomilson, 2016). "Of importance, emerging evidence suggests that over time, school districts and states are maintaining racial disparities in disability identification rates while complying with IDEA reporting and, thus, avoiding consequences" (Artiles, et al. 2016, p. 806). The U.S. Department of Education (USDE), in its call for equity, urged school districts to identify and address the root causes of disproportionality (USDE, 2016, p. 1). This means that more school districts will need intensive cultural competence training to provide educators opportunities to engage in deep conversations about race and biases (Ford et al., 2017; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Cross (1989) is well cited in educational and mental health literature for the continuum of cultural competence (Bustamante, et al., 2009; Ford & Whiting, 2007).

Cultural competence requires continuous reflection and development of attitudes, policies, and practices (Cross, 1989; NASW, 2016). Cultural competence in school settings requires that all stakeholders (i.e., board members, administrators, teachers, students, parents) participate in the developmental process (Cross, 1989).

Cultural competence is an evolving process and is necessary for individuals and systems to continuously develop understanding and respect of diverse backgrounds and cultures (Cross, 1989; Gay, 2010; NASW, 2016; Tran, 2014). According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2016),

> Cultural competence refers to the process by which individuals and systems respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions, spiritual traditions, immigration status, and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each (p. 13)

Cultural competence requires constant reflection of educators' biases and the willingness to engage in ongoing learning opportunities (Cross, 1989; Gay, 2010; NASW, 2016). Doing this can ultimately impact relationships with others from diverse backgrounds and cultural groups (Gay, 2010; Howard, 2007; Moule, 2009).

Culturally Responsive Educators. Many educators are either ill prepared or unprepared to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, especially those diagnosed with disabilities (Bakken et al., 2011; Ford, 2012; Harry & Klinger, 2006). As previously presented, in order to truly address the needs of CLD learners, educators must strive to become culturally competent. Educators must also be

mindful of their behavior and diligent in their actions, ensuring that they are engaging in culturally responsive practices (Gay, 2013). Cultural responsiveness results in changed behavior (act) and cultural competence results in a changed mindset (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009).

When educators are culturally responsive and intentional in their efforts to meet the needs of students, they are more likely to experience academic and social-emotional success (Bakken et al., 2011; Maye & Day, 2012; Warren, 2013). Scholars suggest several best practices for educators working with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Bakken et al., 2011; Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995; 2009):

1. Form trusting/ caring relationship building.
2. Acknowledge students and parents' experiences and strengths. Make encounters meaningful.
3. Expect that all students have the capability to learn and be successful.
4. Acknowledge one's own cultural identity/self-critique.
5. Integrate culturally relevant content and social issues.
6. Connect teaching and learning to students' lives.

Scholars concede that ongoing professional development and opportunities for employing research to practice is imperative for improving outcomes for CLD youth (Garcia et al., 2012; Patton, 2011; Piazza, 2015). The importance of pre-service and in-service teachers having professional development opportunities that engage and model cultural responsiveness is an essential topic that scholars agree needs to be addressed (Garcia et al., 2012; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Ukpokodu's (2011) study on the professional development of educators working with urban learners confirms the importance of micro learning experiences. Preservice and in-service teachers enrolled in a graduate level course were given opportunities to create a dialogue about various topics related to students' backgrounds, culture, and an examination of their practices of teaching math. The teachers in the study reported that the professional development enabled them to gain a different perspective of their students and how best to meet their needs by engaging in culturally responsive practices. Some participants explained how math can be a vehicle to educate students on a variety of issues that promote social justice and other issues relevant in students' communities. Most importantly, teachers engaged in self-reflection and discussed how setting high expectations for students and teacher accountability can help improve outcomes for culturally diverse students.

The importance of pre-service and in-service teachers having professional development opportunities that engage and model cultural responsiveness is an essential topic that scholars agree needs to be addressed (Garcia et al., 2012; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Patton, 2011; Piazza, 2015). In a case study conducted by Hubert (2014), Hispanic and Black students reported feeling academically successful and connected to the learning environment when teachers showed an interest in them and made the lessons relevant to their experiences. Results revealed that students were more engaged and experienced academic improvement when educators were culturally responsive. Hubert (2014) concluded that teachers' high expectations of their students impacted their students' confidence. Warren (2013) acknowledges that the interactions between teacher and student impacts students' behaviors. These interactions, whether positive or negative,

ultimately contribute to student outcomes (Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Hollis & Goings, 2017; Warren, 2013). Warren (2013) suggests that educators engage in cultural learning opportunities in and outside of school to gain a different perspective on the needs of students and to improve outcomes. This has implications for how school leaders address the needs of CLD students and the professional opportunities afforded to the teachers who educate them.

Professional Development. With the rapidly changing demographics of the U.S. student population, some school districts are beginning to make professional development focused on cultural competence and equity a priority in order to better address the needs of their students and families (Zalaznick, 2015). Communication regarding expectations for equitable practices, identifying the process for ongoing assessment, and providing opportunities for feedback is necessary (Brown, 2011; Bakken and Smith, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Educational leaders should feel empowered to set the tone for a climate that honors multicultural diversity and is inclusive of all stakeholders (Gallagher, 2012; Irvine, 2012). All invested stakeholders bring unique experiences, talents, and skills that can be utilized to positively impact the lives of students (Garraway & Robinson, 2017). Schools invested in improving the academic and social–emotional wellbeing of their diverse students will need to become more comfortable having ongoing conversations about race and equity (Simmons, 2017). Educators will also need to acknowledge that their beliefs and practices impact student achievement (Castro-Olivo, 2010; Simmons, 2017). This might mean that some educators will be uncomfortable, but the opportunities for self-reflection and examining beliefs can be a powerful first step in informing practice (Castro-Olivo, 2010; Simmons, 2017).

Culturally responsive educators are involved in professional development to assist them with addressing the unique needs of students (Ahram, 2011; Bakken & Smith, 2012; Brown, 2012; Howard, 2007). Ongoing learning opportunities focused on cultural competence are imperative to improving learning outcomes for students (Bakken and Smith, 2011; Howard, 2007). Howard (2007) identifies five phases of professional development that school leaders should consider as they address staff needs:

1. Building trust.
2. Engaging personal culture.
3. Confronting issues of social dominance and social justice.
4. Transforming instructional practices.
5. Engaging the entire school community.

Scholars concede that the aforementioned phases of professional development are essential measures to build the capacity of staff in order to meet the diverse needs of students and families (Bakken & Smith, 2012; Brown, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Research shows that culturally responsive principals engage their teachers in cultural competence training and provide a "safe" arena built on trust in an effort to confront biases, stereotypes, and prejudices that influence teaching practices (Bakken & Smith, 2012; Brown, 2012; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Santamaria, 2014). Clark and Fillwalk (2010) assert that professional development around social justice, equity, and culture is a continuous mindfulness and process of self-examination. Hence, developing teachers' social justice beliefs and cultural awareness in order to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students is not a one-time professional

learning opportunity, but a constant and strategic process of change (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Clark & Fillwalk, 2010; Cross, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

School and Community. CLD students may face many challenges (e.g., marginalization due to race or language) as they transition through school, which if left unaddressed, can impact their academic achievement and social-emotional well-being (Garraway, 2017; Johnson & McGowan, 2017). Scholars agree that challenges outside of school resulting from social, political, or economic issues, in addition to difficulties at school (i.e., academic, behavioral, social, etc.), may impact the ability of CLD students to experience success (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Khalifa, 2012). The impact of stressors in school and in the community can alter the trajectory of CLD youth and cause them to be further marginalized (Ahram et al., 2011). This has serious implications for how educators address the needs of CLD students so that these students can experience successful outcomes. In addition, it is important that students receive instruction in a safe and nurturing learning environment so that they will remain present and engaged in school (Elias, 2006; Garraway, 2017). Hence, it is imperative that school leaders and teachers improve culturally responsive practices that focus not only on academics, but social emotional learning (Elias, 2004; 2006; Castro-Olivo, 2010; Garraway, 2017; Simmons, 2017).

It is imperative that educators strive to understand their students outside of school walls and work with invested stakeholders to improve outcomes for students, especially those who have been marginalized by society (Khalifa, 2012; Turnbull et al., 2011). Furthermore, "…leaders need to understand the values, norms, and beliefs of the communities, families, and students served by the school" (Madhlangobe & Gordon,

2012, p. 179). When educators reach students and their families in their communities and show genuine support and caring, trusting relationships can be formed (Gay, 2010; Khalifa, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Khalifa's (2012) study of an alternative high school principal's practice of cultivating home-school relationships suggests that high visibility and commitment to advocacy is influential in building trust and fostering home-school communication. Results of the study revealed that the responsiveness of the educators impacted students' social emotional well-being and academic achievement (i.e., behavior changes, identity changes, and improvement of grades). Participants reported a decrease in drop-out rates, increased graduation rate, and the likelihood of pursuing post-secondary options.

Other scholars suggest that educators develop better communication with students and their parents by providing opportunities for parents to be involved in the school and making them feel welcome (Bakken & Smith, 2011; Epstein et al., 2008; Ferlazzon, 2011; Garbacz et al., 2017). As previously presented, improving communication and engaging families will require educators to identify biases and prejudice as well as a commitment to ensuring that the unique needs of their students are met (Gay, 2010; Ladson- Billings, 2009). This also means that school leaders will need to consider resources and make the time to ensure that students have access and opportunities to experience success (Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Jackson & Hilliard, 2013).

As previously mentioned, it will take a shift in mindset, identification of biases, open dialogue, and a willingness to strive for cultural competence if educators are truly committed to improving outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Ferri et al., 2016; Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Gaye, 2010). Furthermore, it is

imperative that educators collaborate effectively with other invested stakeholders to partner with parents of students with disabilities in an effort to improve outcomes for these students (Frances, Haynes, & Nagro, 2017; Rosetti et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2011).

Student and Parent Engagement

To improve outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, it is necessary for educators to take the time to build relationships with students and their families-considering their experiences, challenges, and strengths (Kalyunpar & Harry, 1999; Milner, 2015; Trainor, 2005; Trainor et al., 2011). Kalyunpar and Harry (1999) conceded that it is not necessary for educators to have the same experiences as the families they serve, but they must have the willingness to identify the biases that impact relationships and decisions regarding students. Building relationships with CLD students and their families is necessary (Frances et al., 2017; Henrich, 2013; Geenen et al., 2005; Jung, 2011; Stanley, 2015), and when this occurs, less children will feel isolated at school and have greater opportunities to experience success (Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Johnson & McGowan, 2017). Since CLD students with disabilities are likely to face challenges unfamiliar to some of their White peers, they are especially in need of trusting relationships at home and school (Garraway & Robinson, 2017). Positive relationships at school can cause students to be more engaged in learning which further impacts academic and social-emotional outcomes (Castro-Olivo, 2010; Simmons, 2017). Therefore, providing a safe and nurturing environment will greatly increase the chances that students are academically successful (Gay, 2010; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Building positive relationships and engaging parents of students with disabilities continues to be a significant issue that needs immediate attention (Brandon & Brown, 2009; Frances, Haines, & Nagro, 2017; Turnbull et al., 2011). Developing relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families is important, and especially families of children with disabilities since they may not understand the necessity of special education or the process (Frances et al., 2017). In a study focused on early intervention and developmental delays, Magnusson et al. (2012) found that some Black and Hispanic mothers reported lack of meaningful conversations about disability and interventions with the referring provider (i.e., Pediatrician). The participants were limited in their awareness of milestones and their child's needs. Unfortunately, some of the mothers reported feeling pressured to seek and receive services for their children with special needs. "African American mothers tended to go along with services to avoid trouble…the end result was a process from which mothers were further disengaged" (Magnusson et al., 2017, p. 6).

Scholars agree that educators need to be aware of students' and their families' various cultures and practices that influence decisions related to their child's disability (Frances et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2011). Furthermore, Turnbull et al. (2012) conceded that various micro cultures influence relationships between schools, students, and their families: (1) race, (2) language, (3) ethnicity, (4) geography, (5) religion, (6) age, (7) income, and (8) gender. In addition to the aforementioned micro cultures, the impact of having a child with a disability can also influence the relationships between schools and families (Patrikakou, 2011) as well as their involvement (Rosetti et al., 2017). Henrich (2013) posits that some parents of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children are

faced with challenges such as language barriers that may cause them to be less involved in their child's education. This has implications for how schools engage CLD students with disabilities and their families (Fishman & Nickerson, 2014; Harry, 2008; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Ferrel, 2012; Patrikakou, 2011; Turnbull, et al. 2011).

Engaging CLD Parents. How educators in schools engage CLD students with disabilities and their parents is of great importance if these students are to have access and opportunities that allow them to meet their fullest potential. In fact, The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) mandates that schools receiving Title I funding identify barriers to parental participation, particularly marginalized groups, and implement programs to engage students and their families in the educational process. Implementing programs to engage families may not be an adequate fix if the barriers that often keep them disengaged are not considered and addressed (Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Jackson & Hilliard, 2013). Harry (2008) asserted that deficit perspectives of CLD students and their families as well as "cross cultural misunderstandings" regarding the child's disability may impact parental involvement (p. 1). Furthermore, educator biases and low expectations create significant barriers to relationship building and can negatively impact the trajectory of culturally and linguistically diverse students. (Harry & Klinger, 2006; Sullivan & Bal, 2013).

Engaging CLD Students. Interactions with trusting individuals at school and the community may not be the norm for CLD youth, especially those with disabilities (Garraway & Robinson, 2017). For instance, Harry & Klingner (2014) observed inequitable treatment of Black and Hispanic students by their teachers. Harry and Klingner found that many of the educators believed that intrinsic deficits and family

factors were to blame for these students being placed at-risk for poor academic and social outcomes. Furthermore, educators saw Black students in the study as less compliant and more troublesome than their White and Hispanic peers, which inevitably could have impacted the student-teacher relationship (Harry & Klingner, 2014). During this critical phase of life, it is imperative that adults serve as role models and provide supports to ensure youth are provided with learning opportunities that prepare them for a productive future (Garraway & Robinson, 2017). If educators and policymakers fail to address the issues that impact marginalized culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth with disabilities, then these youths may face serious consequences which can ultimately have a negative impact on society (Offerdahl et al., 2014; Voulgarides, 2018).

When school environments are not nurturing and make students feel unwelcome, some students become isolated, miss school, experience gaps in their learning, and become even more disinterested in school (Balfantz, 2007; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). An unwelcoming environment (i.e., lack of caring/nurturing; poor home-school communication; mismatch between home and school culture/expectations; staff bias, etc.) sets students up for chronic absenteeism (Steeley & Lukacs, 2015; USDE, 2016; 2017), which can cause them to become further lost and isolated from a society that often does not view them as a priority (Balfantz, 2007; Offerdahl et al., 2014).

In their study of disproportionality, Sullivan and Bal (2013) found that students with higher attendance rates were significantly less likely to have been identified for special education. This has implications for how educators build relationships with and invest in students from diverse backgrounds. Scholars agree that school, family, and community risk factors can disrupt learning, cause educational gaps, and can lead to

increased school dropout (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004; Blazer, 2011; Leake & Stodden, 2002; USDE, 2016; 2017). When students are engaged in school and develop positive and trusting relationships, they are more likely to experience successful outcomes such as higher graduation rates and college and career readiness (Gunther et al., 2012; Khalifa, 2012; Jackson & Hilliard, 2013).

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities who do not have positive relationships at school are more likely to lose interest in school and are at risk for chronic absenteeism (Balfantz, 2007; Garraway & Robinson, 2017). CLD students who are chronically absent from school may place themselves at the center of negative attention and become further scrutinized by schools and society. "There has been a fundamental shift in policing around the world in recent years…which has detrimental effects on the legal socialization of young people" (Offerdahl et al., 2014, p. 9). This increased presence of police may have serious implications for some students with disabilities (i.e., emotional and behavioral disorders) who may not always possess the social skills to solve problems during stressful situations or conflicts. Hence, schools will need to be intentional in collaborating with families to identify and address the factors that impact absenteeism among CLD students with disabilities (Balfantz, 2007; Blazer, 2011; USDE, 2016; 2017). This may mean assisting students and their families in identifying and addressing the barriers that often keep them isolated and absent from school.

Parent Participation in the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) Process

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 2004), schools are required to ensure full participation of parents in the IEP process (Yell, 2016). However,

there continues to be a critical need to improve parental participation of students with disabilities. Brandon and Brown (2009) asserted that positive home school relationships are essential to improving outcomes for students with disabilities. It is imperative that teachers understand the importance of parental participation in the IEP process and in their child's education in general; however, research has shown that general and special education teachers are not adequately prepared to work collaboratively with families of children with disabilities (Broussard, 2003; Kochhar-Bryant, 2008; Trainor, 2010; Warren-Miller, 2016). Barriers to parental involvement can negatively impact students' academic and social-emotional progress and scholars agree that some of the most common barriers to parental involvement in the IEP process include: (1) poor home-school relationships; (2) lack of parental understanding of the IEP process (i.e., procedures, rights and services); and (3) inconvenient IEP times (Brandon & Brown, 2009; Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Tran, 2014).

Consistent communication, respect, and effective collaboration increase the likelihood that teams reach mutual agreement on what is in the best interest of the child (Brandon & Brown, 2009; Tran, 2014; Warren-Miller, 2016). It is imperative that school teams identify barriers to parental participation and work together with parents to best meet the needs of students with disabilities (Brandon & Brown, 2009; Ferrel, 2012; Jung, 2011; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015). Doing this may decrease parental concerns and hesitancy to engage and partner with their child's school (Ferrel, 2012; Klingner & Harry, 2008). Parental engagement is extremely important for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities who may require intensive support at school and home (Ferrel, 2012). Taking a collaborative approach to include parents in every aspect of their

child's education, especially in the special education process, may lessen the chance of misunderstandings and unwanted litigation. Even with the mandates of IDEA (1997), scholars agree that there is still a need for IEP teams to be more inclusive of parents (Geenen, Powers & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Stanley, 2015). It is necessary for school leaders to provide professional development and opportunities for all educators to enhance their knowledge of the students they serve, build positive relationships, and engage in genuine collaboration to improve outcomes for students with disabilities (Geenen, Powers & Lopez-Vasquez, 2005; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Tran, 2014; Warren-Miller, 2016).

Even with laws over the past years to improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities, there are still serious concerns related to pre-referral, identification, as well as service delivery for students with disabilities (Ferri et al., 2017; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Voulgarides, 2018). The exploration of this issue is especially critical for Black and Hispanic students who are often left behind and experience poor outcomes compared to their White peers (Artiles et al., 2016; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Voulgarides, 2018). Educators, especially school leaders, will need to examine their practices and make the education of CLD students a priority if there is to be an effort to narrow the achievement gap between these students and their White peers (Harry & Klinger, 2006; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Milner, 2015; Voulgarides, 2018). Milner (2015) argues that although building relationships with students and families is critical, there has not been enough done by schools to focus on them. In fact, Milner (2015) posits that students of color and their families continue to be marginalized by educators who may not recognize their own biases. Harry and Klinger (2006) recommend that school districts examine their human

capital, consider enhancing professional development, and hire effective school-based leaders and teachers in needy schools.

Summary

An overview of special education law and issues of race, language, and culture serve as the foundation for this chapter. This chapter presented four key themes found in the literature related to students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: (1) cultural competence in schools; (2) student and parent engagement; and (3) parent participation in the IEP process. A review of the literature implied that cultural competence, building positive relationships, and engaging students with disabilities and their parents in the educational process, may lead to improved outcomes (Rosetti et al., 2017; Turnbull et al., 2011). The following chapter will provide an overview of qualitative research, narrative inquiry, and the implications for the proposed study. The proposed data collection and analysis will be presented.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative research study explored the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents of children with disabilities during the preschool and elementary years (pre-kindergarten through fifth grade). Scholars agree that parents know their children best (Colarusso & O'Rourke, 2004; Landmark et al., 2007; Miller-Warren, 2016) and their voices are critical to improving outcomes for students with disabilities (Ferrel, 2012; Harry, 2008; USDE, 2016). The aim of this study was to elucidate the barriers and challenges faced by CLD students with disabilities and their parents. This narrative inquiry was conducted utilizing narrative parent interviews, focus groups, and journal reflections.

Qualitative Research. Qualitative research is interpretive inquiry that occurs through interaction and engagement with the participant(s) in an effort to understand their unique experiences or problem (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2009; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012; Kim, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Piantanida & Garman, 2009). In addition, qualitative research involves "the collection, analysis and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest…sometimes called naturalistic research, naturalistic inquiry, or field-oriented research" (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012, p. 605). The four characteristics of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) include:

1. Focus on meaning and understanding: Interpretation and understanding of subject's experiences.

2. Researcher as primary instrument: Communication and immediate clarification; collects and analyzes data.
3. Inductive process: Build theories based on phenomena studied.
4. Rich description: Words and visuals to communicate findings.

The existing literature on interpretive inquiry often cites John Dewey's (1938) theory of experience as the foundation of interpretive inquiry (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Kim, 2016; Piantanida & Garman, 2009). Dewey (1916; 1938) is well known for his work focused on improving educational opportunities for all students, with specific emphasis on students' experiences, relationships, and interactions (Cain et al., 2013; Dewey, 1916).

Qualitative methodology was chosen for this study to gain in-depth knowledge of the experiences of parents and their culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) children with disabilities during the primary years. Parents of students with disabilities were sought as participants in this study to gain detailed data on the primary school experience. The descriptive narrative method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988) involves the collection of data through interviews and document analysis that sequences events in individuals or group members' lives. The researcher used individual narrative interviews, focus groups, and journal reflections to collect data.

Research Design

Narrative research is the study of how different humans experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Gay et al., 2009; Kim, 2016). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) have been well-cited in educational research and credited with coining the term

narrative inquiry (Kim, 2016). According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), narrative inquiry involves collaboration with participants while allowing them opportunities to relive their experiences and share their stories. Hence, narrative research is a recursive, cyclical process with an ongoing revelation of understanding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry is an emerging methodology in the field of education but is commonly utilized by researchers from other fields such as anthropology, law, counseling, history, medicine, and psychology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; 2006; 2013; Kim, 2016; Polkinghorne, 2007). Polkinghorne (1988) is well-cited for his narrative research in the field of social science (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Piantanida & Garman, 2009). Scholars agree that conducting narrative research does not involve a rigid process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016). Research questions using narrative inquiry are flexible and allow for unexpected, yet meaningful turns in the research process that always yield an anticipated outcome (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Kim, 2016).

There is some overlap between phenomenology and narrative inquiry, a "close kinship" (Kim, 2016, p. 53). Phenomenology focuses more on the problem to be solved whereas narrative inquiry focuses on the participants' feelings and inner reflections regarding the phenomenon. Narrative inquiry fits best with this study because of the greater emphasis placed on the participants. Narrative inquiry allows participants to reflect deeply about themselves, relationships with others, and provides an opportunity for their voices to be heard. Furthermore, narrative inquiry consists of relationships

between the researcher and participants and allows for co-creation of the storytelling process.

Harry (2008), asserts that quantitative methods of collecting data (e.g. quantitative surveys) may not be adequate to answer questions regarding the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse parents and suggests qualitative methods to better understand their experiences. Furthermore, "the introduction of narrative inquiry as a research methodology has reshaped the field of qualitative research through its close attention to experience as narrative phenomena; through the importance of the relational engagement of researchers and participants…" (Harry, 2008, p.166). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stress the importance of narrative inquiry as a method that enables the researcher to hear stories of participants' experiences and shed light on their often-unheard voices. Scholars agree that the interviewee is a critical source of knowledge in narrative inquiry (Cain & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

According to Adams (2016), narrative inquiry has the benefit of a therapeutic process for participants and the researcher's analysis of their stories can serve as a vehicle to inform others and impact change. The researcher engaged the adult participants of this study in narrative interviews to hear their voices and allow them to share their experiences and that of their children. Doing this explicated the barriers, challenges, and successes faced by culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities and their parents.

Participants

The desired participants of this study were parents of culturally and linguistically diverse children with disabilities in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Since Black and Hispanic students are experiencing significantly higher rates of special education identification compared to their White peers (Artiles et al., 2016; Blanchett, 2014; Harry & Klingner, 2014), efforts were made to recruit parents from these two groups. A purposive sample of Black and Hispanic parents was desired for the study. The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study with parents affiliated with non-public special education schools, parent organizations, and early learning centers that serve a high population of Black and Hispanic students. Thirteen parents of children identified with disabilities were selected to participate in the study. Qualitative research, specifically interviews, typically include a smaller population of participants than quantitative research to allow for more in-depth work with participants and exploration of the phenomena (Creswell, 2009).

Parent participation in the individual narrative interviews and focus groups were critical to the study. Parents of children that were placed at-risk for identification (i.e., in the referral process, school improvement team (SIT), educational management team (EMT), screening meeting, etc.) and had an IEP were invited to participate in the study. Signed permission for audio recording of the sessions was obtained from participants prior to interviews. Each parent participant received a $15 gift card to a local general merchandise store.

Instrumentation

Using self as instrument (Chenail, 2011; Xu & Storr, 2012) requires the researcher to collaboratively interact with participants to make sense of, reflect on, and interpret their experience (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Researchers need to be self-aware of experiences, perspectives, and biases and the impact these have on the study (Piantanida & Garman, 2009). The researcher served as the primary instrument in the proposed study. Special consideration was given to the aforementioned suggestions and the researcher used a personal journal to reflect on the experience. Furthermore, by using self as instrument, the researcher gained deeper knowledge about the experiences of participants.

Stance

Post positive perspectives assume that the researcher should remain objective and be removed from the phenomena of study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Piantanida & Garman, 2009). Other scholars agree that narrative inquiry allows the freedom of writing in the first person to clearly communicate the researcher's stance and justify claims (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Piatanida & Garman, 2009). As a result, the researcher took into consideration the appropriateness of writing in the first person during this research study. Doing this allowed for a more reflective and authentic narrative study.

Reflection

According to Piantanida and Garman (2009), self-reflection in educational research is necessary. In narrative inquiry, self-reflection during all stages of the study, especially data collection, is imperative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016;

Piatanida & Garman, 2009). The researcher wrote self-reflections in a journal and created voice notes after interviews. Piantanida and Garman (2009) discuss three aspects of reflection that this researcher considered when journaling:

1. Recollective reflection: Recalling who, what, when of an experience.
2. Introspective reflection: Researcher looks within (mental and emotional response to experience; identification of biases; new insights, etc.).
3. Conceptual reflection: Connection of theoretical concepts, phenomena of study, and experiences related to study.

Data Collection

The descriptive narrative method (Polkinghorne, 1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) involves the collection of data through interviews and document analysis that sequences events in individuals or group members' lives. The researcher used individual narrative interviews, focus groups, and journal reflections to collect data. Individual interviews and focus groups lasted approximately 45-75 minutes. Following approval from Bowie State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher contacted and gained written permission from the appropriate leadership in the school communities of interest. Permission to conduct the study was obtained by the appropriate leaders serving three different communities located in a Mid-Atlantic state:

1. Parent Teacher Association (PTA) serving grades pre-K – 5
2. CEO of a non-public, special education school serving grades K-5
3. Director of an early childhood learning center serving pre-K.

The participants who were members of the Wakefield (pseudonym) PTA had children with disabilities in grades pre-K through five. Wakefield is a comprehensive elementary school in a suburban, predominantly African American county. Wakefield serves a population of 861 students with 42% of all students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Parents solicited from the special education school, Fallsdown (pseudonym), had children with emotional and behavioral disabilities in third grade. Fallsdown serves 100 students in K-12 from the entire county where participants resided as well as neighboring school districts. The county where these families resided was unable to adequately meet the children's educational needs and paid for their private special education (i.e., non-public). The goal of Fallsdown School is to address each student's unique academic, behavioral and social/emotional needs. The early childhood education center, Central (pseudonym), serves children age birth to 5. Approximately 75% Hispanic and 25% African American/Black students attend the center and 90% percent qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch. Due to confidentiality, the names of the aforementioned sites/organizations will not be shared in this paper.

After site approval to conduct the proposed study, the researcher provided the contact person of each site with recruitment flyers outlining the study. Each site was asked to distribute recruitment flyers to potential parent participants. Once participants were identified for the study, a signed consent was obtained prior to conducting interviews, focus groups, and requests for journals. Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire prior to the interview. Interviews and focus groups occurred November 2018 to January 2019 at various locations and times convenient for the

participants (i.e., coffee shop, home, school). Participants selected for the study met the following criteria:

1. Chose to participate in two individual interviews (in-person or phone) and/or a focus group of three to six people.
2. Child of participant had been identified, in-process, or placed at-risk of identification in special education during grades pre-K-5.
3. Participants had a child with a diagnosed disability or placed at-risk for identification (i.e., in the referral process, school improvement team (SIT), educational management team (EMT), screening, etc.) and had an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Narrative interviewing, a term often used synonymously with open-ended interviews, allows the participant to share their story without structured questions or an agenda (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Gay et al., 2009; Kim, 2016). According to Kim (2016), the interviewer asks relevant questions for clarity, but allows for flexibility in the interview process that will most likely make the participant feel their experiences and perspectives are valued. Scholars agree that the interviewee can be a critical source of knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016) and the interaction between the researcher and participant is critical to the success of the narrative interview. The approach used by the interviewer may depend on how willing participants are to share their experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2002; Kim, 2016). Clandinin and Connelly (2002) state that successful narrative interviews encompass: (1) caring, (2) equality among participants, (3) flexibility, (4) mutual trust, and, (5) conversational style. Seidman's (2013) three-step interview structure was modified for this study:

1. *Individual Interview One* (oral history/chronicle): Sequential expression of a point in the experience being studied (Clandinin & Connelly, 2002).
2. *Individual Interview Two* (contemporary experience): Details of the experience the researcher is studying to elicit in-depth details (Seidman, 2013).
3. *Group Interview three* (focus group): Make meaning of the experience (Seidman, 2013).

Interviews. Participants were interviewed over a course of two months. Six participants were selected for the individual narrative interviews. Each of the six parents was interviewed twice and invited to participate in a third interview (two individual interviews and one (focus) group interview). Two of the aforementioned parents also joined a focus group.

The interview questions were determined by whether the participant needed prompting when telling their story. Approximately six interview questions aligned to the conceptual framework and research questions were considered when facilitating individual interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences. Below is an illustration of the conceptual framework and the interview questions related to each tenet (see Figure 2).

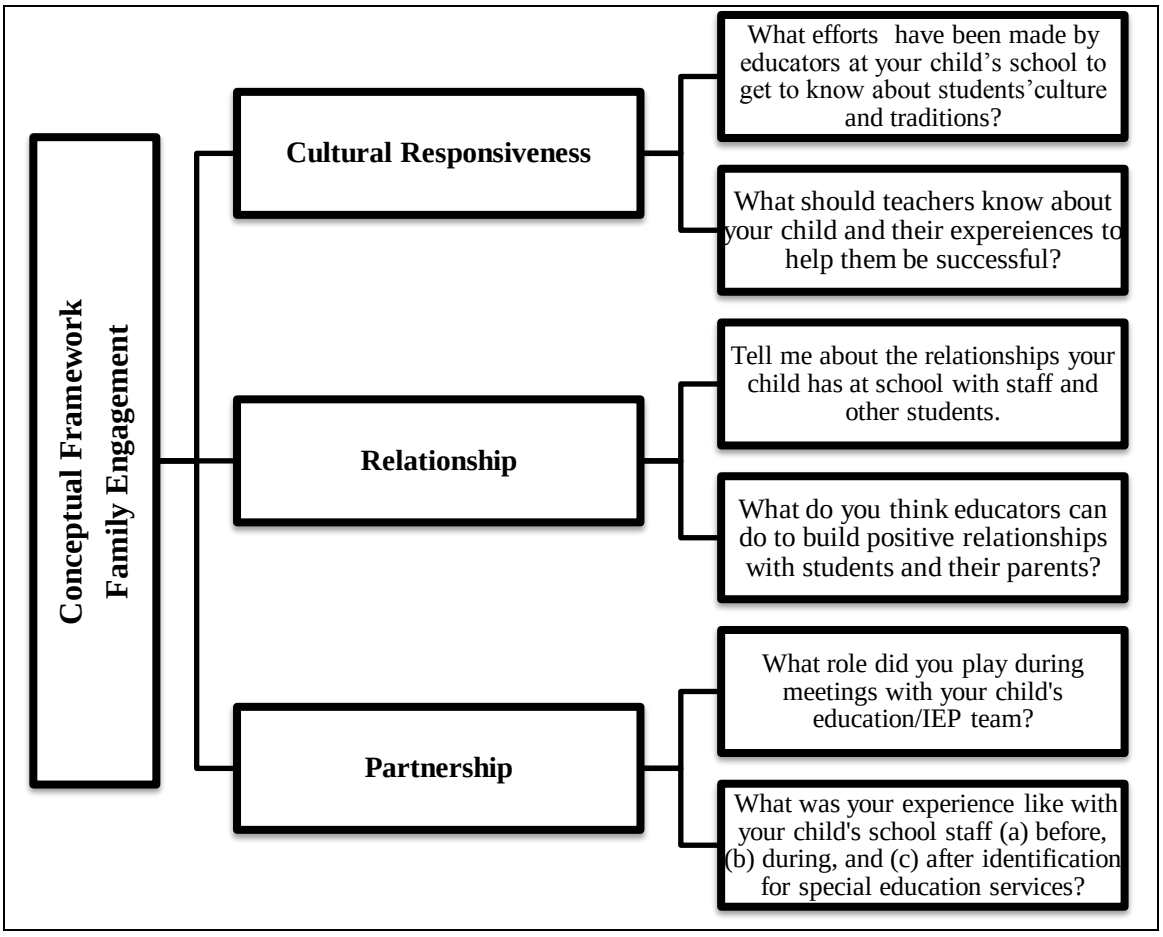

Figure 2. Interview questions and conceptual framework (not adapted from any other source)

An example of questions that were asked during the first and second interviews include:

> Interview one: What was your experience like with your child's school staff (a) before, (b) during, and (c) after identification for special education services?
>
> Interview two: Tell me about the relationships your child has at school with staff and other students.

Narrative inquiry may consist of two phases - narrative phase and conversation phase. The interviewer in the narrative phase is an active listener with limited interruptions. According to Kim (2016), during the narration phase, the interviewer and interviewee participate in a conversation while the interviewer is careful to, "… listen with an ear tuned to sequence, coherence, continuity, meaningfulness, and transformation

in our interviewees story" (Kim, 2016, p. 168). Kim refers to the process of active listening as "narrative competence of listening." At this phase in the interview, there is a reciprocal question and response process that is considered as discourse.

Focus Group. The researcher facilitated two focus groups to include parents of children who were identified, in-progress, or placed at-risk for identification of special education services during preschool and elementary school (pre-K-5). Parents were invited to attend a focus group based on their availability. A total of nine parents participated in focus groups. The researcher made every effort to accommodate parents based on best times of day and location. One focus group met at the early learning center site in a private conference room. The second focus group met in a town centrally located in the county where all participants resided. The focus group took place in a conference room in the community.

There were four pre-K parents who participated in the first focus group and five parents of K-5 students in the second group. Six interview questions were prepared for use during the narrative focus groups in order to gain in-depth understanding of the experiences of the participants. However, both groups were easily engaged and required little prompting from the researcher. The two-sentence format technique was used during the interviews to ensure that participants understood the context of questions. "Morrisey (1987) argues for the two-sentence format as an effective interviewing technique...a statement and a question, which works to explain the question before you ask it" (as cited in Kim, 2016, p. 170). Hence, participants willingly shared their stories and stayed on topic when the researcher asked questions. A few examples of focus group questions include:

1. *What advice would you give a parent on how to partner with educators at their child's school to ensure their child's needs are met?*
2. *What would you say to educators about what they can do to learn about their students' culture and traditions?*
3. *What do you think a parent of a child with a disability might need to know to help prepare them for meeting with the school's special education team?*

Individual interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes and focus groups lasted 60 and 75 minutes each (Atkinson, 2007). The data collection activities took place between November 2018 and January 2019. Below is an illustration of the data collection activities.

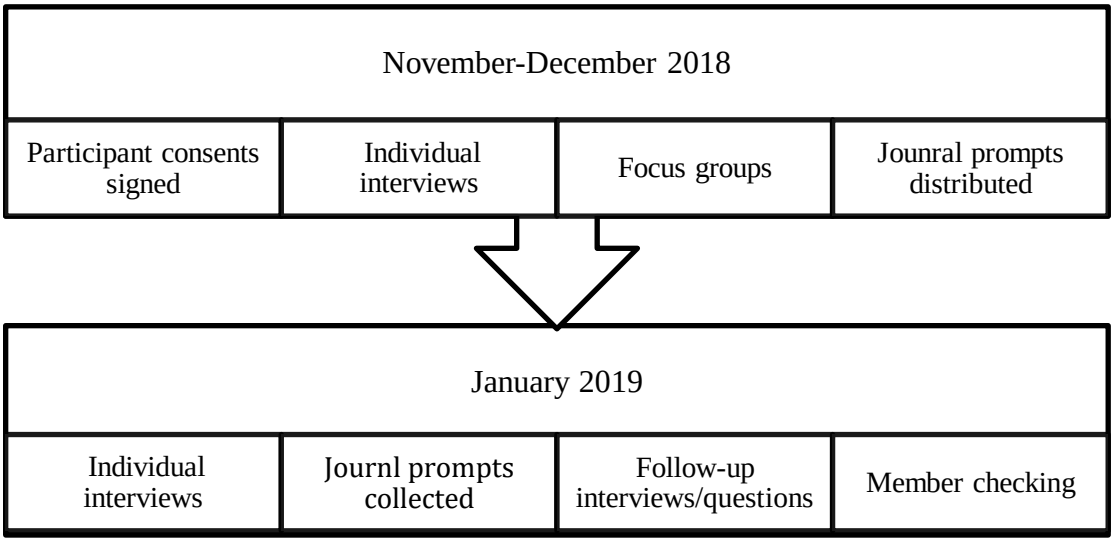

Figure 3. Data collection timeline (not adapted from any other source).

Focus groups provide data collection through group interaction (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Morgan, 1997). According to Morgan (1997), the use of focus groups might include/provide:

1. Formal or informal interviews depending on researcher's purpose.
2. Verbal and self-reported data (qualitative).

3. Opportunity for group interaction.
4. Similarities and differences in participant opinions.

Focus groups have been found to be most successful when participants can engage as if having every day conversations and members feel connected to the topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Focus groups provide opportunities for the researcher to hear about the experiences and perspectives of participants in a group setting that might not otherwise be revealed during an individual interview (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Morgan, 1997). Focus groups were utilized in this study to allow participants an opportunity to share their experiences with other parents and to make connections that offered support and resources beyond the study. The researcher facilitated two focus groups in order to provide opportunities for discourse among participants that enabled the researcher to gather additional data. Doing this also clarified findings from individual interviews (Creswell, 2009; Morgan, 1997).

Journals. In addition to interviews, scholars suggest journals as another method of data collection to gain the perspective of participants (Clandinin & Connolly; 2000; Creswell, 2009). Participants were given writing prompts and invited to journal their reflections. At the conclusion of the interviews and focus group, participants were given an opportunity to write about anything else that they wanted to share regarding their experience with their child's school educators and the special education process. Three journal prompts focused on parents' experiences before, during, or after their child's identification for special education will be provided. Participants had an option to select one or more of the three prompts. An example of a journal prompt included:

Option 1: Write a letter to a parent of a child who will be attending their first meeting with their child's educational team (e.g., special education team, educational management team (EMT), school instructional team (SIT). What would you say to them as they prepare for the meeting?

Journaling provided participants the freedom to share additional details that may not have had the opportunity to discuss during the interview or focus group. Two participants submitted journal entries. Journal entries provided the researcher knowledge of the participants' experiences and served as additional data used in creating the collaborative story (see Chapter Four). Participants submitted journal entries electronically.

Conducting research in an ethical manner is imperative to obtaining *reliable* results in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest a variety of strategies commonly used in qualitative research to ensure "credibility", a concept more commonly used in place of *reliability* and *validity* (p. 239). "Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static, nor is what many experience necessarily more reliable than what one-person experiences" (p. 250). To increase the credibility of the proposed qualitative study, several strategies were utilized:

1. Triangulation/Multiple Data Sources. For example, interviews, focus groups, and journal prompts.
2. Member checks or "respondent validation" of some of the interpreted data (p. 246). Transcripts of the individual interviews were shared with selected participants. Participants of the focus group were provided a one-page

summary that captured key themes from the transcripts in order to verify accuracy of the transcription.

3. Peer-review of selected text. Selected text from transcribed interviews were shared with a qualitative research coach to determine consistency in emerging themes.

Finally, the researcher interpreted participants' stories and shared the final product, a compilation of individual interviews and focus group data, with all participants. The final product, a retelling of participants' stories through analytic re-descriptions (Kim, 2016) consisted of a combination of their narratives into a "unified episode" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 7).

Data Analysis

Scholars agree that qualitative research is explorative and does not always have a definitive end (Clandinin & Cain, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Creswell, 2009; Gay et al., 2009; Kim, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, questions and answers to research questions may arise well after data collection (Kim, 2016). This means being open to the possibility of unexpected findings and the willingness to dive deeper into the data (Kim, 2016).

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) provide three suggestions to consider when analyzing narrative data:

1. Broadening: Description of participants, values, culture, and historical considerations.

2. Burrowing: Participants' experiences and perspectives are explored and impact of the phenomena being explored; point of view of participant-avoiding generalizations.
3. Storying and Restorying: "The person returns to present and future considerations and asks what the meaning of the event is and how he or she might create a new story" (p. 11).

After collection of data, this researcher engaged in all of the aforementioned approaches, which was found appropriate for data analysis. This is evident in the structure of Chapter IV.

The coding process used in this study closely followed Kim's (2016) and Saldana's (2015) recommendations. According to Saldana, "some methodologists advise that your choice of coding should be determined beforehand (deductive) to harmonize with your study's conceptual framework, paradigm, or research goals...emergent, data-driven, (inductive) coding choices are also legitimate" (p.75). Both deductive and inductive coding was used in this study. Two interviews from the pilot study were transcribed, analyzed, and coded to assess the possibilities of both methods (Saldana, 2015). The family engagement conceptual framework was utilized as an outline that assisted the researcher in interpreting the narratives of the participants. Themes emerged (i.e. self-advocacy) that enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of some of the challenges parents faced during the special education process. These findings will be discussed in Chapter IV.

Kim suggests that qualitative data consist of multiple coding processes and four elements of analysis: (1) coding, (2) categorizing, (3) patterns, and (4) themes. Data

collected from interviews, focus groups, and journal entries were coded and analyzed to explore meaning and identify themes (Creswell, 2009; Saldana, 2015). Codes were used to "extract" and organize the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 35). Descriptive codes were used to summarize the essential ideas expressed in participants' journal entries and In Vivo coding allowed the researcher to capture key quotes during interviews and questionnaires (Saldana, 2015). Saldana (2015) posits that In Vivo coding may be useful for novice qualitative researchers new to coding. In Vivo was a good coding method for this narrative study because data were used to "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldana, 2015, p.106).

The researcher listened to each audiotape at least twice, read interview transcripts multiple times, and engaged in three coding cycles to determine themes. The researcher transcribed eight of the audiotaped interviews. The other 14 (combination of individual interviews and focus groups) were sent to a professional transcription company to better manage time and data. The researcher read each transcript at least twice, made notes in the columns, and used multiple color highlighters to track key words and phrases that appeared multiple times across transcripts. In addition, some transcripts were coded electronically. In this case, the researcher used electronic highlighters and made comments in the margins of a Microsoft Word document. Qualitative coaches provided feedback and support during data analysis to ensure accuracy.

The researcher engaged in three cycles of coding. During the first coding cycle, the researcher read each transcript line by line and looked for descriptive words or phrases. The researcher created a code list (Saldana, 2015) with selected themes and definitions of each (see Appendix K). During the second coding cycle, a data collection

chart (see Appendix L) using an Excel spreadsheet was created with key words, quotes, and researcher comments that resonated from the second reading. The third cycle of coding involved categorizing the codes further. After coding and categorizing the data, short words and phrases were created into longer, more meaningful themes.

Miriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest linking concepts after coding by using a visual such as a diagram or model. Chapter IV provides a detailed figure of the key themes found during the coding process of this study. An Excel spreadsheet was created to organize and manage data from interviews. An expert and CEO of a well-known data analysis and management company offered support by reviewing the Excel spreadsheet and providing feedback on data collection. Echo Desktop Software was used to store notes and audio from interviews.

Saturation of the data is important when conducting qualitative research. Saturation means that the researcher has extensively sought data to answer the research question and any new data becomes redundant (Kim, 2016). After 3/4 of the interviews were conducted, the researcher found that new interview data did not reveal any significant new information, but served to confirm the existing data. Kim (2016) stresses that the nature of qualitative research is that there will ultimately be new findings and information that unfolds. Therefore, saturation is something that may not always be reached in qualitative research.

Several steps were taken by the researcher to ensure thoroughness in data collection and analysis. As previously mentioned, a qualitative coach was utilized to ensure accuracy in the coding process. In addition, while attending a qualitative research conference in January 2019, the researcher participated in several coding and data

analysis workshops. The researcher met one on one with several seasoned scholars to obtain clarity about the coding and analysis process and to get feedback on the study.

Summary

This chapter provided details on the methods that were used to collect data from parents of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities. Narrative inquiry was selected for this study to gain in-depth knowledge about the experiences of parents and their children while in the primary grades (pre-kindergarten through grade three). Participants were invited to complete three interviews (two individual and one focus group). In addition, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences by completing journal entries with pre-determined writing prompts. The purpose of this study was to elucidate the barriers and challenges faced by CLD students with disabilities and their parents.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Narrative inquiry provides an opportunity for the researcher and participant to actively engage in ongoing dialogue about a particular phenomenon in order to co-create the story (Clandinen & Connelly, 2000). Kim (2016) asserts that some narrative inquirers find it difficult to write using their voice and that of the participants. It is a balancing act that Kim stresses is necessary in narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is not a typical methodology that always uses an "objective authorial stance, like "scientists," even though the American Psychological Association publication manual has advocated for the use of personal pronouns…" (p. 112).

According to well-cited narrative scholars, it is important for the researcher's voice to be heard in the collaborative research process (Clandinin & Connely, 2000; Kim 2016; Kisber, 2018). Narrative inquiry allows the freedom of writing in the first person to clearly communicate the researcher's stance and justify claims (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kim, 2016; Piatanida & Garman, 2009). As a result, I took into consideration the appropriateness of writing in the first person during this research study. Doing this allowed for a more reflective and authentic narrative study. Consistent with narrative mode of inquiry, findings will be reported using pronouns (i.e. I, he, she, they, etc.).

Qualitative research, specifically narrative inquiry, typically includes a smaller population of participants to allow for in-depth exploration and description of the phenomena (Creswell, 2009, Clandinin & Connely, 2000). A purposive sample of six Black and Hispanic parents was desired for the study. Six parents participated in two

individual interviews lasting between 45-60 minutes. In this chapter, the narratives of six selected participants will be highlighted. These six parents were selected from the group of 13 participants (combined individual interviewees and focus group attendees) because they represent various characteristics of the overall group of culturally and linguistically diverse participants. The six individual interviewees provided the researcher with rich data and an in-depth knowledge of their experiences.

The researcher began with general information about participants' family background, child's disability category, and educational setting. Following the six narratives, a comparison of emerging themes across participants (individual interviews and focus group) was shared. The chapter concludes with a collaborative story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) using various quotes from participants in the individual interviews and focus groups. The collaborative story method allowed the researcher to bring the collective voices of participants together in a coherent manner. Table 4.1 provides demographic information of the six selected participants.

Table 4.1

Selected Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Education	Race/Ethnicity	Child's Grade(s)	Child's Diagnosis
Tonya	47	Master's	African American	K 2	• Speech • ADHD
Hannah	35	Bachelor's	Black/Ethiopia	pre-K	• Speech
Elise	38	Bachelor's	Hispanic/El Salv.	pre-K	• Emotional (EBD)
Joanna	48	Bachelor's	Black	3	• Emotional (EBD)
Kya	44	Bachelor's	Black	K	• Learning (LD)
Chelsea	52	Master's	Black/Jamaican	5	• Speech • ADHD

Selected Profiles

The narratives of the six selected participants was shared with specific focus on their perspectives of the special education journey (before, during, and after identification). The individual narratives were organized using the following subheadings:

1) Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability/Diagnosis
2) Special Education Process and Interaction with School Team
    a) The Beginning: Before Identification - Experiences of parents and their child before disability diagnosis and identification for special education
    b) The Light: During Identification - Experiences of parents and their children that enhanced their understanding of the special education process or an enlightening experience during the special education process.
    c) The Truth: After Identification - Experiences of parents and their children after special education identification.

Following the six individual narratives, the key themes that emerged will be shared.

Narrative #1: Chelsea

Chelsea was born in London, England and relocated with her Jamaican-born parents to the Bronx, New York at the age of seven. Chelsea relocated to Maryland when she was 28 years old where she has remained with her husband and two daughters. Since her move out of state, she and her family maintain close ties and she is still connected to her Jamaican "roots." Chelsea and her immediate family identify as a Black. Her husband is a chef and owns a small business. Chelsea has a master's degree in education and has worked as a middle school instructional specialist, academic intervention teacher, and school principal.

Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability. Chelsea became aware that her daughter Jada had cognitive delays as well as attention issues when she was in pre-K. Chelsea was able to easily detect her daughter's delays in comparison to her peers. Chelsea took the initiative to contact Jada's pediatrician regarding her concerns and wanted to rule out any hearing issues. The hearing results did not reveal any issues so she and her pediatrician decided to move forward with a complete battery of tests to include educational testing to address the cognitive delays and speech assessment. The testing was completed outside of the school system at a reputable children's educational institution. The results of the testing revealed that Jada had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD-inattentive type) as well as speech delays that qualified her for a disability diagnosis of Other Health Impaired (OHI). Chelsea shared that she agreed with the diagnosis because it confirmed what she and her husband were seeing at home:

> *One of the things that we noticed is if you gave her a list of things to do, she might just kind of remember one… if she did all three of them, that was great. But more than likely she'd do one and kinda' half do the other and completely forget about the other.*

Special Education Process and Interaction with School Team. Jada, currently a fifth-grader, has attended the same elementary school since pre-K. Chelsea indicated that during pre-K, the school team never expressed any concerns about her daughter's delays. As Chelsea explained, "one of the things we realized is that she is a very quiet child in school and because she was quiet and well-behaved, the teachers weren't really pushing her on what she did and did not know." When Jada went to kindergarten,

Chelsea and her husband took the initiative to get support for their daughter by requesting an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting.

The Beginning: Before Identification. Chelsea met with Jada's kindergarten teacher prior to the initial IEP meeting to express her concerns and to find out how Jada was performing in class. Jada's kindergarten teacher was willing to work with Chelsea to ensure that Jada had a positive learning experience in class and could be successful. Chelsea recalls that during the meeting Jada's teacher said, "please just trust her with me." Chelsea shared that the teacher provided repetition to ensure Jada got the concepts being taught and chunking the assignment into smaller sections to reduce overwhelming her. Chelsea felt the strategies the teacher used with Jada were appropriate for a child with ADHD.

The Light: During Identification. Chelsea knew that she and her husband made the right decision to request an IEP meeting for Jada. Based on the reports from the outside agency, teacher assessments, and parental input, Jada qualified and was given an IEP. Chelsea explained,

> *What we did was got an IEP for the speech disability and then um, we attached the ADHD to it in supplemental services. So that allowed her to have speech services at school. So, she had speech services from kindergarten until last year (fourth grade).*

Chelsea indicated that she felt the special education school team engaged her as a full partner in her child's educational process.

The Truth: After Identification. Chelsea was overall pleased with the special education services her daughter received. However, there were two specific situations

that caused her concern. One instance involved Jada receiving compensatory hours due to a violation of the required special education hours.

> *Yea, because her speech teacher was out for a while. She was having a baby and there was really no substitute and the substitute kind of came here and there, but never fully came. So, they ended up giving me additional hours when the speech teacher did come back to make up for those hours that she did not have speech. So, during that period, I was displeased with the service.*

At the end of Jada's fourth-grade school year, Chelsea experienced resistance from the special education team. Although Jada was successfully dismissed from special education services for speech during fourth grade, Chelsea believed the ADHD was a significant factor in Jada's frustration with class and homework. The ADHD impacted Jada's ability to complete assignments. She expressed her daughter's struggle with focusing and completing assignments, "like we were home doing homework from like, 4:30 pm to like 9:30pm, 10pm, 11 o'clock she just, you had to just sit there with her all the time. Like the minute I left to do something else, I'll come back- it won't all be completed. It wasn't right." Chelsea consulted with Jada's pediatrician and the decision was made to put Jada on medication for the ADHD.

At the end of Jada's fourth-grade year, Chelsea reached out to the assistant principal, the leader of the special education team, to discuss concerns about Jada's struggles with schoolwork. Chelsea requested the special education team formally document accommodations that Jada was supposedly receiving in class. The special education team that met before summer break did not believe Jada's needs warranted any

accommodations from an IEP or 504 Plan. Chelsea agreed to table the discussion until Jada's fifth-grade year to see how she progressed.

Chelsea reached out to school staff at the beginning of Jada's fifth-grade year to follow up on the discussion from the previous year's meeting. Jada's fifth-grade teacher explained that she provided accommodations (i.e., chunking assignments, repeating directions, preferential seating) to assist her with work completion. The assistant principal indicated that Jada's needs were not significant enough for a written plan. Furthermore, he indicted the classroom teacher could meet Jada's needs without formal documentation of accommodations. Chelsea stressed that she wanted the team to address the issues of low/poor work performance and develop a formalized plan (e.g., IEP or 504 plan) that would follow Jada in preparation for the transition to middle school. Chelsea explained,

> *You know that she's identified as a student with ADHD and without a 504 plan, what safeguards will I have that she will continue to access these accommodations should there be a change in her school or school team?*

Chelsea's perseverance has implications for CLD parents of student with disabilities who advocate for adequate services for their children.

Chelsea rarely let her child's teachers know that she is also an educator, but if necessary, she would "pull that card" to ensure they provided her daughter with adequate educational services. At the time of the interview, Chelsea was planning for the next meeting with Jada's school team and hoped they would all be on the same page and come to an agreeable solution. Furthermore, Chelsea was exploring all of her options and making certain that she was familiar with the laws related to children with disabilities.

Narrative #2: Hannah

Hannah moved to the U.S. in 2002 from Ethiopia to pursue better educational opportunities. She has a bachelor's degree and works as a home health aide. She met and married her husband while in the U.S. Her husband also identifies as a Black Ethiopian. They have three children ages two, four, and seven. Her four-year-old son is in pre-K and has been diagnosed with a developmental delay. He receives special education services for speech.

Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability. Hannah recalls the confusion and frustration she felt as she tried to make sense of her son's developmental delays. At the age of two, Hannah knew that her son Charles was not making the same rate of progress with his speech and motor skills compared to his peers. Initially, she thought he was just being lazy and would "grow out of it." At home, his family learned to communicate with him and responded well to his wants and needs. In addition to helping him communicate, the family worked with Charles on his motor skill deficits. Hannah explained that Charles had difficulty pedaling his bike and did not attribute this to a delay, but instead thought he was being lazy.

Charles' teachers thought he had a speech delay because they often could not understand what he was saying. If only his teachers had taken more time to get to know him and understand his needs, Hannah believes Charles would have made more progress and a special education evaluation may not have been necessary. She believed there should have been clearly communicated strategies implemented prior to the teachers' request for a special education evaluation.

Special Education Process and Interaction with School Team. The lack of transparency and inconsistent communication with Charles' teachers caused Hannah to question their motives as well as her own parenting skills. Hannah was extremely worried about what she may have missed regarding her son's development. Had someone taken the time to ensure she understood the IEP process, Hannah believes she would have been less worried.

Without clear answers from Charles' teacher, Hannah decided to take a leap of faith to pursue resources so that he could experience success. Hannah and her husband "went along" with the pre-K teacher's and special education coordinator's request to have Charles evaluated for special education services. Hannah contacted Child Find, the county's resource for special education referrals.

The Beginning: Before Identification. Hannah was not aware of the seriousness of her child's delays until Charles' pre-K teacher made a comment in passing. Hannah reported that the teacher's comments caught her off guard and made her question the teacher's motives. Hannah shared,

> *I mean I wasn't aware of his problem. I thought it's normal or he can grow out of it. So, I don't know. Oh, one of his teachers asked me if he was premature one day. I said, "No he is not." I do not know why I was asked this. And I said, "why did you ask me that?" She said, "oh, just to know." That's how she asked me. She didn't just come to me straight and say, "we think that he has this kind of problem." Nobody explained that to me or tell me anything. After maybe after a month or so they want me to sign a paper so that they'll refer him to Child Find.*

Hannah believed the teachers could have done a better job of clearly communicating in a way that she understood. She needed support with understanding that Charles was performing at a lower level compared with his peers.

The Light: During Identification. Hannah reiterated that she began the special education journey frustrated and uneducated about her child's delays and needs. She indicated that once the teachers realized that she was upset; a special educator at the early learning center stepped in to offer support. The special education coordinator at Charles' early learning center suggested that Hannah take Charles for a hearing and vision screening prior to his special education evaluation. Initially, Charles failed the hearing assessment, but was rescreened and passed after his cold subsided.

A psychologist and speech pathologist at their local elementary school evaluated Charles. Hannah felt disempowered when her son was taken to another room for testing because she did not want the evaluator to return with news that there might be something "wrong" with Charles. She described the process as long, stressful, and frustrating. Hannah recalled being asked to refrain from intervening during Charles' evaluation and to allow him to answer the questions and perform tasks on his own.

Hannah reported that she was not an active participant in the special education process because she did not fully understand what was going on. "It's very hard. You don't know what's going on with your child and you don't know what's the next thing. You just have to pray and see what's gonna' happen." Furthermore, Hannah was unsure of the roles of the special education team members that attended three of Charles' meetings (screening, review of assessments, and IEP development). It was not until the last of three meetings (IEP development) that Hannah began to understand the role and

contribution of each team member. During the third IEP meeting, she began to see "the light" at the end of the tunnel. Hannah indicated that the team could have done a better job of communicating with her earlier in the special education process and making her feel like an equal partner.

The truth: After Identification. Hannah did not totally grasp the extent of her son's developmental delays until well after his special education evaluations were completed. During the third meeting when the team met to develop the IEP, Hannah indicated that she felt relieved that Charles would be getting support for his speech delays and motor deficits. The services were to take place at the early learning center within his pre-K classroom. Since Charles' IEP development and implementation, Hannah reports a significant improvement in his speech and motor skills.

Although she still has difficulty articulating Charles' IEP goals and objectives, Hannah has an overall understanding of his needs. Charles receives services for speech and occupational therapy at his early learning center. Hannah is satisfied with the services that Charles is currently receiving as indicated on his IEP. She feels comfortable knowing that she has a contact at the school if there are any questions regarding the goals and progress. Hannah's story revealed that home-school communication and effective collaboration is necessary for all children, especially those with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Narrative #3: Joanna

Joanna, a 45-year-old African American woman, was born and raised in North Carolina. She moved to Maryland after college where she met and married her husband Colin. Joanna has a bachelor's degree and works in the information technology (IT) field. Colin has an associate's degree and also works in the IT field.

Colin and Joanna have two sons: Austin (age 22) and Clyde (age nine). Joanna indicated that everyone in her household was born in the U.S. and identifies as African American. Clyde is in third grade at a non-public special education elementary school. Clyde's school serves students with behavioral and emotional disabilities and is paid for by their local school district. Clyde has behavioral challenges that impact his education and has a formal diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability. Joanna and Colin became concerned about Clyde's behavioral challenges after several suspensions from two different preschools. Clyde had been dismissed from two daycare centers due to educators' inability to manage what they considered his severe outbursts of anger. Joanna realized that some of Clyde's behaviors may have been a result of the center climate and lack of engagement. Joanna shared Clyde's experience at a home daycare:

> *He was six months and we didn't want to put him in a facility. So, we put him in a home daycare. And she would take them in the kitchen. Like they would be sitting in the highchair and they can't move. She had other kids there and she had too many kids. They would be hollering and crying and she wouldn't respond unless they might have stunk on themselves or it was time for him to go home. She had so many kids so I don't know if that added to his crying and his behaviors.*

After multiple suspensions from daycare, Joanna and her husband spent a great deal of time trying to find the best environment that could meet Clyde's needs.

By the time he transitioned to pre-K, Clyde had been in three different daycare settings. His parents found an early learning center that seemed to have the capacity to manage and reduce some of the previously observed behaviors (tantrums, yelling, throwing, biting, etc.). Joanna and Colin noticed some improvement in Clyde's behavior and thought the structure and positive relationships in the new setting was a contributing factor. Years later, Joanna found out from Clyde that the director of the early learning center would often take him and a few other children off site. Surprisingly, the director used corporal punishment to manage behaviors. Joanna shared that eventually she broke down crying out of frustration for not being able to help her son. Joanna and her husband knew something was not typical about Clyde's behavior. She explained, "we just knew something was wrong. We said something has got to change because he's not feeling fine. He's not learning. Something is wrong. We need to put some protection in place." That protection would later come in the form of an individualized education program (IEP).

Special Education Process and Interaction with School Team. After graduation from pre-K, Clyde attended a public school that was located in his neighborhood. Prior to the first day of school, Joanna and Colin requested a meeting with his teacher to talk about Clyde's needs. Joanna described her family's relationship with Clyde's kindergarten teacher as positive and collaborative. The school principal during Clyde's kindergarten year was actively involved and offered supportive strategies when

disciplinary issues arose. Joanna believes that Clyde's kindergarten teacher and the administrator during that school year genuinely wanted Clyde to experience success.

When Clyde transitioned to first grade there was significant staff turnover, including a new principal. This marked a downhill turn for Clyde. Joanna believes the inexperience of the new staff, their lack of positive behavioral strategies, and poor classroom management, were factors in Clyde's numerous suspensions. Joanna and Colin spent numerous hours at school observing Clyde and offering support in the learning environment. They soon began to feel their child was unwelcome at yet another school and knew something needed to be done to address the behaviors.

The Beginning: Before Identification. Joanna and Colin felt that Clyde had become a target and was treated differently than his peers who were involved in similar incidents. Clyde often came home with reports that his first-grade teacher and other educators in the building did not listen to him and often took the side of others without giving him an opportunity to express his side of the story. The turning point came when the principal accused Clyde of a serious offense and pressured him into admitting to something he did not do.

The Light: During Identification. Joanna and Colin tried to partner with the school team (principal, first grade teacher, and counselor) to get support for Clyde well before things spiraled out of control. However, they were met with resistance by the school team. Therefore, Joanna and Colin decided to take their concerns to a higher level. When they initially contacted the school district office, Joanna felt district level staff had judged the situation unfairly without giving her a voice. She reached out to the district office to express concern over a suspension and to seek support for Clyde's

behaviors. Joanna shared, “I tried to appeal and they told me no appealing for a suspension...They said you need to talk to the community person that comes out to the school...they went on his behaviors.” It wasn't until Joanna sought the support of an outside advocate that educators at the school and district level were willing to consider strategies to address Clyde’s social-emotional needs.

Joanna and Colin hired a special education advocate who arranged a meeting with representatives from the school district’s administrative offices. With support, they requested a special education screening meeting and were granted an evaluation that consisted of psychological and educational testing. Joanna expressed disappointment over waiting months to find out the results of the evaluation, but ultimately Clyde qualified for special education services.

The Truth: After Identification. Once Joanna and Clyde gained a better understanding of the special education process, they felt empowered and were able to advocate for their son not only to get an IEP, but a school placement that best met his needs. Clyde has experienced tremendous success in his current non-public placement. Joanna shared that she gets very nervous when thinking about each new school year and what the transitions may bring. Clyde has been successful in his current school placement for two years.

Clyde’s current school placement has proven to be the best learning environment to meet his needs. He has experienced the most success at what Joanna refers to as the “transition school” that serves children with behavioral and emotional disabilities. Clyde is achieving both academically and behaviorally. Joanna and Colin have observed Clyde in school and have witnessed the principal and other educators building positive

relationships with other parents and students. Joanna shared that Clyde's new teacher and principal treat him with love and kindness, but are firm and set limits. Joanna explained, "the relationship she (teacher) has with him and how he responds to that compared to before; she really acts like -no she's not acting- she really cares." Joanna described Clyde's third-grade school environment as welcoming, safe, and organized. Preliminary findings suggested that there is a need for principal sensitivity and cultural competence in working with CLD students with disabilities.

Narrative #4: Elise

Elise is a 38-year-old El Salvadorian born woman. She identifies as Hispanic. She moved to the U.S. at the age of three with her mother and two brothers. Elise attended elementary and secondary school in Washington, D.C. After graduation, she attended college in Maryland and earned a bachelor's degree in finance. Elise is an accountant. Her husband Elmer is a steamfitter.

Elise and her husband have two children, ages four and six months. Elise's husband and children were born in the U.S. and they identify as Hispanic American. Allison is four years old and attends a pre-K program at an early learning center that services general and special education students. Allison has a diagnosis of development delay (DD) related to delays in speech. She also receives services for behavioral challenges that may be a result of an emotional disability.

Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability. Elise shared that as a child she experienced delays in learning, but did not realize it until adulthood. Growing up, Elise indicated she was used to her mother making excuses for her behaviors (hyperactivity) and learning challenges. Elise recalls her mother stating there was nothing

wrong with her and that Elise was being lazy. Initially, Elise did not notice that Allison had similar behaviors. For instance,

> *I didn't see anything because I mean she acted like I did. I know that she didn't...she didn't stay focused, and she was all over the place. Like she did not finish one thing and go to the other, but that's just how I am. So, I didn't think that nothing was wrong with her.*

It wasn't until Allison began pre-K that Elise was faced with the reality that Allison had behavioral challenges (i.e., lack of focus, impulsivity, etc.) that were impacting her learning and socialization.

Special Education Process and Interaction with School Team. When Elise arrived at the early learning center the first day of pre-K, staff had changed the original class list that was previously shared with parents. Elise expressed anger when she realized the class list was not a mistake and that no one took the time to have a conversation with her beforehand. In the midst of arrival, the first day of school, Elise shared that staff tried to have a conversation with her about the class change.

In the middle of a busy arrival, the classroom teacher tried to rationalize the change by sharing that Elise had struggled academically and behaviorally while in the Early Head Start program. Elise expressed disbelief with the news and stated, "that's the way I am so I must have had the same disorder she has." Elise was embarrassed and saddened as she stood in the entry of the classroom waiting for answers and direction. Allison was prepared to be in a classroom with her friends and not in a separate class with other struggling students.

Elise expressed frustration and anger because she wasn't getting an explanation that she could comprehend. Instead of understanding her perspective, she felt the teacher was "not explaining it right" and using a disrespectful tone of voice. Elise was overwhelmed, began to lose patience, and wanted to "beat somebody up." The teacher referred Elise to the special education coordinator at the school for further discussion and support.

The Beginning: Before Identification. Allison attended the same early learning center since she was two years old. Elise was surprised that there was not previous communication about the suspicion of a disability when Allison was in the Early Head Start program. Elise shared feeling angry and fearful when the special education coordinator informed her that the educators suspected a disability and wanted Allison evaluated:

> *I'm like wait a minute. Hold up...disability? She's not disabled. Like she's not. No! Nothing is wrong with her. She might be lazy or something. I don't know, but she's not like...I don't understand what you guys are talking about.*

Elise was invited to a team meeting to discuss concerns that were observed by the staff. At the meeting Elise was able to express concerns and felt heard. Initially, Elise did not want to hear about staff observations of Allison because she did not want to face that her cild might be "disabled," a word she despises. Eventually, Elise agreed to have Allison evaluated after coming to the realization that there was a delay. She recalled asking many questions about Allison's delays and what could be done to help her improve. After meeting with the special education coordinator, classroom teacher, and

the curriculum specialist, Elise had a better understanding of the next steps to get her child evaluated.

The Light: During Identification. Elise felt supported during the evaluation and identification process. She developed a good relationship with the special education coordinator and still feels that she can go to her with any questions or concerns. The difficult part of acceptance for many CLD parents of children with disabilities is often the perception of others. This may be particularly difficult for individuals from cultures where people with disabilities are not understood and are marginalized. Elise recalls a conversation with her mother after Allison's evaluation and identification:

> *I went back home and I told my mom. It is like a cultural thing. My mom was like, "Nah. You know your brothers failed…Everyone like learn at a pace...There's no point of you pressuring the child." But I was like yea, but you know, when we don't get ahead of stuff-like kids with autism-all this stuff. And it's best to get ahead.*

The evaluation process was not as painful as Elise had imagined. She felt Allison would receive the full benefit of having the disability formally documented with goals. Elise is not clear on the exact IEP goals that were developed for Allison, but does know that the goals are focused on helping with speech and behavior.

> *Hopefully she will need probably just one... um not the speech therapist, but the other... I forgot um the name off the top of my head. I can't think of it. It'll be a good sign if half of progress is met to either eliminate one or cut it down to not every week, but twice a month maybe.*

Elise's lack of understanding regarding Alison's goals has implications for how special educators engage parents in the IEP process as well as educating them on their child's disability and needs.

The truth: After Identification. Elise has been pleased with the progress that Allison has made since the development of the IEP. She shared that Allison communicates more at home and school. For instance, Allison is able to express what she wants and also "understands more" if Elise or the teacher gives directions. The team suggested strategies to work on at home and Elise has found that Allison's attention level has increased.

Elise reports that there is staff at the school if she has concerns about the IEP or needs clarity. She is not certain if the implementation of the IEP (i.e., speech therapy, behavior modification, etc.) is the reason for Allison's improvement or if she is just maturing. Elise thinks that Allison will eventually "grow out" of her speech deficits and behavioral challenges. Regardless of the reason for the improvement, Elise expressed appreciation for the accommodations Allison receives to help her experience success in the learning environment and at home.

Narrative #5: Tonya

Tonya, a 47-year-old African American woman, was born and raised in Washington, D.C. She moved to Maryland during her senior year of high school. After attending college in Virginia for a bachelor's degree (dual degree) in early childhood education and English Language Arts, she moved to Maryland. Tanya has a master's degree in education, administration certification, and works as an academic intervention specialist at an elementary school. Tonya decided to remain in Maryland after she met

and married her husband, Joshua. Joshua is a construction supervisor and also owns several rental properties.

Tonya and Joshua have two sons: Jaden, 7 years old, and John, 5 years old. Tonya indicated that everyone in her household was born in the U.S. and identifies as African American. Both of her sons have been diagnosed with a disability. John has an IEP for a developmental delay (speech) and Jaden receives accommodations through a 504 plan for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. (ADHD).

Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability. Jaden experienced speech delays when he was two years old. Tonya's friend, an educator, pointed out that Jaden was bright, but was not speaking. Tonya contacted Child Find, the county's resource for Infants and Toddlers special education referrals, to have him evaluated. Initially Tonya did not want Jaden to receive an IEP for speech because of a lack of understanding of the delays. Since Jaden was under the age of three, she was able to opt for the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), which provides a detailed plan to address delays using an in-home coaching model. When Jaden turned three years old, Tonya was able to opt out of the IFSP and get an Individual Education Program (IEP) to meet his needs in a school setting.

Tonya quickly identified when John, her second child, was experiencing delays similar to Jaden. At the age of two, John was very quiet and used very few words to communicate. She explained, "I didn't catch this with my older son and I felt so bad as an educator. I was like, *'why didn't I see this?'* So, when he (John) came around I knew right away." Tonya felt that John's delays were more significant than Jaden's so when he turned three years old she opted out of the IFSP and requested a meeting for an IEP.

Special Education Process and Interaction with School Team. Tonya was pleased with Jaden's progress in the one year that he received special education services using the coaching model at home and at the early learning. She felt that staff through the county's Infants and Toddlers' program was very knowledgeable about special education and supportive. When they came to her home or the early learning center, staff were always professional, modeled strategies for the parents and staff, and left detailed visit summaries for follow-up.

Tonya was also very pleased with the interaction she had with the special educators at the school where Jaden and John went for pre-K. The goals on their IEP were clearly articulated. The teacher and other educators on the special education team were "on it" and seemed to know her children and their needs. Tonya shared, "I love them. They were on it. I have my meetings and they were all over his goals. They told me what to work on and of course, I did." Tonya indicated that the staff treated her as a valued team member and allowed her to share the progress observed at home. Doing this allowed the team to consistently implement strategies that would support her sons' progress.

The Beginning: Before Identification. Tonya describes the first year that Jaden received special education services through the Infants and Toddlers' program as a wonderful experience. Both parents work full time so services were rendered at the daycare center. The coaching model appeared to be working at the early learning center where Jaden spent most of his instructional time.

The second year at the early learning center was not as successful as the previous. Tonya indicated that Jaden's second-year teacher had not communicated any concerns to

her about his progress until they met several months into the school year for the parent-teacher conference. Tonya recalls one of many incidents with center staff that helped with the decision to transition Jaden to a school where he could receive special education through an IEP. She shared,

> *The second year he was at the daycare he got a younger teacher and she was overwhelmed because there were a couple of kids that had ADHD. She had a couple of kids with autism and she was not trained to work with these kids. So, I'm thinking she's never complained to me about my child. So, I'm thinking he's well.*

Tonya was disturbed that Jaden's center teacher could not share anything positive about him during the conference, but instead gave an unsolicited opinion that Tonya should get Jaden "tested" because he didn't sit still; followed others; and was non-responsive during story time. Tonya reported the teacher to the center's director and shared frustration over the lack of communication and unprofessionalism of the staff. Tonya received an apology from the director and teacher.

At the age of three, Tonya decided to allow the Infants and Toddlers Program to evaluate Jaden to see if he qualified for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). After all, Tonya knew that Jaden might need additional support as he transitioned to elementary school and wanted to ensure that he was making the progress to catch up with his peers. Transitioning to an IEP meant Jaden would no longer receive services at the early learning center. Instead, services provided under an IEP would require Jaden go to a school setting, which Tonya thought might be good for him.

The Light: During Identification. Initially Tonya did not want Jaden to receive an IEP for speech because she did not understand the severity of the delays. Since Jaden was under the age of three, she was able to opt for the Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) which is a detailed plan to address delays of children (birth to three) using an in-home coaching model. Right before Jaden turned three, Tonya was able to opt out of the IFSP. Jaden qualified for, and received an Individual Education Program (IEP) to meet his speech needs in the school setting. At the time of his eligibility, children could only receive special education services under Part C of the American with Disabilities Act until the age of three. This meant Jaden would need to transition to the IEP for children above age three.

Tonya explained that although Jaden was dismissed from special education services, he was struggling due to attention issues. His kindergarten teacher was "fantastic" and was able to communicate effectively with Tonya. The teacher observed Jaden exhibiting similar behaviors to children with ADHD. Tonya knew that Jaden had a good teacher who loved him and provided structure.

When Tonya received a call the second week of school she knew it was time to consider an evaluation for ADHD. Tonya shared,

> *I love the fact that she was proactive and she was on the up-and-up. She took the time to get to learn my child. His godmother was like, "you don't know... you don'.t want them labeling him because you know with our Black kids, especially our African American boys, they label them."*

Tonya understood her friend's perspective, but believed Jaden's teacher sincerely cared for him and desired for him to be successful. Jaden's teacher often asked Tonya questions

about his interests so that she could make connections with his learning in school. Jaden's teacher worked hard to engage him so that he could be more available for learning.

Based on his continuous challenges at the early learning center, pre-K, and home, Tonya and her husband decided to contact Jaden's pediatrician. Jaden was identified with ADHD and subsequently qualified for a 504 plan that provided the accommodations to address the inattention in class. Under a 504 plan, students who may not qualify for an IEP, but have a disability (e.g., medical needs) that impacts their availability for instruction, may receive accommodations to meet their needs.

Tonya's journey in getting John identified for special education services was not as stressful as her first experience with Jaden. When John's disability became evident, Tonya had already been through the various stages of the special education process. The journey was less tedious the second time because Tonya had knowledge of the resources available to ensure John experienced success. Tonya had a better understanding of the law, her parental rights, and the importance of advocating for what her kids deserved.

The truth: After Identification. Tonya "loved" the staff at Jaden and John's early learning center during their pre-K year and felt the transition from an IFSP to an IEP was seamless. Both boys qualified and benefited from an IEP to address their speech delays. If there were questions that arose during the evaluation process, Tonya indicated there was support of the school staff as well as other friends who were educators. Having levels of support to guide her during the identification and goal writing process proved to be a benefit. Tonya felt the special education team was on the same page regarding Jaden and John's needs and goals were clearly documented on the IEP.

Jaden successfully met his speech goals as outlined in his IEP and was successfully dismissed from special education services in first grade. He is in second grade and receives accommodations through a 504 plan for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. (ADHD). John has also made great progress on his speech goals and is communicating better with his peers and adults. He is in kindergarten and continues to receive special education services for speech at school. John and Jaden attend the same public elementary school where Tonya is actively involved.

Narrative #6: Kya

Kya, a 44-year-old African American woman, was born and raised in Texas. Kya married her college sweetheart, Terrance, and moved to Maryland for career opportunities and to start a family. Kya is a marketing and sales manager for a major construction supply company. Terrance is a former athlete and currently works as a health and fitness consultant. Kya and her family identify as African American.
Kya and Terrance have two elementary school children: Milan (7) and Jordan (5). Jordan was diagnosed with a very rare multi-system disorder, Kabuki, when he was an infant. He receives special education services through their neighborhood elementary school and is coded as developmental delay (DD). Jordan is in kindergarten.

Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability. Kya was considered a high-risk pregnancy and was monitored closely by her obstetrician when pregnant with Jordan. After several sonograms, she was informed that her unborn child may have a brain abnormality as well as heart complications. Determined to move forward with the pregnancy, Kya and Terrance sought support through the medical experts at the local children's hospital as well as the community's Infants and Toddlers program. They

wanted to be prepared for life with their second child who may be born with significant challenges.

Special Education Process and Interaction with School Team. Kya and Terrance had a good experience with the Infants and Toddlers special education staff that supported Jordan from birth to age three. The Infants and Toddlers program is a collaborative process that provides modeling for parents to support their child's needs in the "natural environment." Kya and Terrance's experiences with the special education team at the pre-K and elementary school level were not positive. Kya felt that she had to "stay on top" of the staff in pre-K and kindergarten to ensure that her son received an education that met his needs.

When Jordan started pre-K, Kya recalls that his teacher did not know much about her son and made no attempt to involve the parents in the educational process. Jordan's pre-K teacher made assumptions about his needs without consulting the family. The teacher's assumptions would lead to low expectations for Jordan. Kya and Terrance had high hopes for Jordan and challenged any educator that was not capable or willing to give him the appropriate education he deserved. The start to kindergarten was just as stressful as pre-K. Kya shared that she likes Jordan's new school and kindergarten teacher, but explained that there are too many students in the class for him to be without an aide:

> *...His teacher is awesome, but she can't... she's got 24 kids in the classroom...and then she (teacher) said, "you can see when I had to turn away to attend to another student." So, I'm not happy right now with my experience. And I'm trying to give them an opportunity to handle it, but if I don't get a resolution today then I will be reaching out to higher ups.*

Jordan's teacher is responsible for 24 general education students, but makes great effort to support him without the special education aide that is required on the IEP. There have been many bumps in the road along the special education journey. Kya remains hopeful that Jordan will get his needs met through her diligence and advocacy.

The Beginning: Before Identification. Kya and Terrance were as prepared as they could before their unborn son's arrival. The "unknown" caused great anxiety, but they sought medical and educational resources in anticipation of delays. Kya shared that her OB recommended that she connect with the Infants and Toddlers program that supports families and their children (birth through age five) with disabilities. Kya was pleased that she had the support of her OB to help her get through the medical and psychological impact of her pregnancy.

The Light: During Identification. Jordan was identified with Kabuki Syndrome, a rare disorder of multiple abnormalities (i.e., facial features, growth delays, cognitive delays, stunted growth, etc.) at birth and was expected to have significant developmental delays (i.e., failure to thrive, etc.). Kya and Terrance had support at birth through the Infants and Toddlers Program, a federally funded program that provides special education services to children and families from birth to age five. They were referred to Child Find, the county's special education referral source, by Jordan's pediatrician in order to get a head start on addressing the delays. The evaluation results confirmed that Jordan had significant delays that qualified him for special education services. Jordan's diagnosis was confirmed as developmental delay, which was added to his Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and carried over to his Individual Education Program (IEP) when he reached the age of three and transitioned to pre-K.

The Truth: After Identification. When Jordan entered pre-K, Kya had to advocate for Jordan to be placed in a class that was on his academic and social level because she knew that he was performing well above the others. For instance, the school staff had Jordan scheduled for an autism class with non-verbal peers and although he had an autism diagnosis, Kya knew he should be in the least restrictive environment. Through Kya's hard work, Jordan's schedule was changed and he attended school part of the day in a general education pre-K and the other half-day with his special education class. After a rough start to school, Kya explained that Jordan ended up having a great pre-K experience. She "loved" the special education early learning center that Jordan attended and wanted him to repeat pre-K to get another year of support. However, the special education team agreed that holding Jordan back would not be beneficial due to great progress. Kya and the team prepared for kindergarten transition by ensuring that Jordan's IEP was clearly reflective of his needs.

The transition to kindergarten was a serious trial for Jordan. The special education team at the early learning center where he attended pre-K added a one to one aide on his IEP to assist with task completion. Kya indicated that upon entering elementary school, Jordan's aide was not in place and he was falling behind the other students in the class. In fact, Jordan was not able to complete tasks unless the teacher "stood right over him"". Kya waited patiently for answers about the aide, but found the special education department was unhelpful and could not give clear answers on how the problem would be corrected. Kya decided to inform the principal in an effort to resolve the issue prior to calling the school district's central office/board of education. Kya explained,

I honestly didn't want to start off with going to the principal. I shouldn't have to. She has 50 things going on. You have a whole special education department, but we weren't getting straight answers. The special education department wasn't doing their part really, or they don't have the answers. Yea, they just weren't. We were just getting the run-around. To me, that's what I felt like, but when the principal stepped in I noticed a difference. I noticed a timeline.

The principal's quick response to the parents' needs has implications for how administrators can effectively communicate and problem solve with CLD parents in the special education process.

The principal informed Kya that the interview process had begun to hire the aide. Kya expressed disappointment and frustration about Jordan falling behind in kindergarten after all the work that had been done in pre-K. Kya had worked hard to get resources so that Jordan could have positive academic and social experiences in school. Kya is an advocate who will not stop until Jordan gets what he needs and deserves.

Individual Interview Analysis

The key themes that emerged from the individual interviews were partnership in special education process; educators' cultural competence; and educator and parent knowledge of disability and special education process. Preliminary findings from individual interviews indicated that navigating the special education process was frustrating for all six parents at some point during their journey. Four of the parents initiated the special education process and sought support when they recognized there were delays in their child's development. The other two parents realized there were some delays, but felt their children would "grow out of it" and did not seek outside support.

Support and engagement by educators throughout the special education process varied for parents. Four of the participants reported a lack of communication and feeling like unequal partners in the special education process. The narratives of the aforementioned participants have implications for educators and the need to improve experiences for culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities.

Focus Groups

Unlike individual interviews, the focus group is the unit of analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2014). For this study, emerging themes were extracted at the group level. The researcher used a modified "collective biography" to re-tell participants stories. Collaborative biographies are narratives of individuals who share commonalities; yet have varying perspectives based on their experiences. "They are autobiographical, not biographical, shaped by each person's choice and selective memory and by the circumstances of our work together. No doubt they are shaped again by my own selections, resonating variously with my own experience (Bateson, 1990, p. 33).

The modified collective biographies of the following two focus groups are organized using the following subheadings:

1) Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability/Diagnosis
2) Special Education Process and Interaction with School Team
    a) The Beginning: Before Identification - Experiences of parents and their child before disability diagnosis and identification for special education
    b) The Light: During Identification - Experiences of parents and their children that enhanced their understanding of the special education process or an enlightening experience during the special education process.

c) The Truth: After Identification - Experiences of parents and their children after special education identification.

Focus Group #1: Early Learning Center Parents (pre-K)

All four of the participants were bilingual women with a range of education. Two were stay at home mothers (Isabel and Bertha) and the other two worked outside of the home. Elise is an accountant and Jeslyn works as a program coordinator. Table 4.2 provides an overview of the demographics of the focus group participants.

Table 4.2

Focus Group #1 Demographics

Participant	Age	Education	Race/Ethnicity	Child's Grade	Child's Diagnosis
Isabel	30	High School	Hispanic	pre-K	• Speech Delay • ADHD
Jeslyn	32	Associate's	Hispanic	pre-K	• Learning (LD)
Elise	38	Bachelor's	Hispanic	pre-K	• Emotional (EBD)
Bertha	30	High School	Hispanic	pre-K	• Learning (LD) • Autism

Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability/Diagnosis. Two of the participants indicated that their culture played a big part in whether or not to seek special education services for their children. Jeslyn explained,

> *It's a cultural thing for us. Uh, we have a cultural thing and I have boys. In my case boys take more time to walk and to talk. It was a cultural thing that just boys are more lazier or more easy, easygoing, right. Um, but I knew something was going on and it was. I, I just knew it.*

Participants consulted with their families prior to agreeing to special education assessments. They tended to value the opinion of their family, but ultimately made the decision to move forward because they recognized delays and wanted to get early intervention. For instance, Elise shared that her mother wanted her to delay getting her daughter assessed. According to her mother, Elise and two of her siblings had delays and "grew out of it." Jeslyn indicated that she knew her son had delays, but found herself justifying to her family why he needed to be assessed. She shared,

> *It was not okay being delayed…And so, it literally took six months for me to finally get him tested 'cause everybody was like, "he's bilingual, he's bilingual… I know something's wrong. I clearly can see like his processing isn't right.*

Jeslyn was the only parent in the focus group who took the initiative to have her child assessed. The other three parents suspected something was wrong or were in denial until the school staff initiated the conversation.

Special Education Process. Participants agreed that the special education process is an overwhelming, but worthwhile experience. Parents shared their journey and feelings of anxiety, frustration, and finally relief. "It's like going to your first job and you feel like nervous" (Bertha). One parent approached the process willingly while others were very apprehensive because they did not want their child to be labeled. One parent shed tears during the focus group as she reflected on her personal educational experiences as a young child with learning challenges. Another participant shared a concern that others would perceive her daughter as "retarded." Thoughts of her daughter's learning and behavior challenges made the parent uneasy about a special education diagnosis.

Three participants shared that they were aware of nearby counties that had better special education services based on ZIP code. Three of the parents had experienced inequitable special education services based on where they lived. For instance,

> *I'll tell ya, it's more resources because they cut off pre-K because the funding wasn't available…So, I really had no other choice (to move). The IEP program is a lot better anyway in (county omitted)… I can see the big difference…*

All four participants indicated that they were increasing their knowledge about the resources available for students with disabilities. Furthermore, they were beginning to share their experiences with their friends who in turn were moving in order to receive the best possible services for their children. The movement out of neighborhoods based on educational resources could have implications for how school systems collaborate or cerate consortiums with standardized practices to adequately meet the needs of students and their families regardless of geographical location.

The Beginning: Before Identification. Two of the participants were residents of the county where Central is located and the other two moved into the area to obtain better services for their children. After trying unsuccessfully to get special education services in her county of residence, Jeslyn moved to the county where Central is located to ensure her son had access to appropriate services. The educators at a neighborhood school where Jeslyn sought support indicated that her son did not qualify for services based on an assessment. When Jeslyn transferred to a county with more resources, her son qualified and received services. She explained,

> *They did the testing (new county). They were like, "you qualify and we'll start speech therapy in like two week"… We started the process simultaneously with*

(county omitted) and (county omitted)…So, I was able to get him tested through here and then I tried locally as well cause like I said I was going to try to get as much service as I could for him. (county omitted) did the same exact testing and because he was a point off they said he didn't qualify and he was perfectly fine and that they could reassess him again in six months.

Preliminary findings have implications for how school systems invest in resources to provide quality services for students with disabilities.

Participants shared that although Central had a good reputation for educating racially and culturally diverse children, there were instances when they felt the engagement of parents in the special education process was lacking. For instance, two of the participants felt the classroom teacher's approach to sharing concerns was not the most pleasant. One parent indicated that there should have been a meeting to discuss her child's progress before bombarding her with information about a referral for special education. Parents indicated the lack of communication or the method of delivery made it very difficult to engage with the school team.

The Light: During Identification. Participants indicated that the identification stage of the special education process was challenging. Three of the focus group participants indicated feeling frustrated because the process was long; they had unanswered questions; and felt alone as they awaited the team's decision regarding qualification for services. Participants reported that educators could have done a better job explaining the special education process. Parents indicated they had little knowledge about (a) screening meeting to determine if a disability was suspected; (b) formal assessment results; and (c) development of IEP goals. Two of the participants indicated

that having a friend or translator present would be ideal so that parents and educators communicate more effectively.

According to participants, an interpreter would likely be able to assist speakers of other languages in gaining a better understanding of what occurs during special education and other important meetings related to their child's education. Brenda shared,

> *Sometimes it's very difficult even when you're speaking in your own language to understand too. So, if you're not clear have another meeting or have somebody who can help you in that meeting. It's very important at least to know a little bit of English so they [parents] can understand what is going on so they can help the kids better.*

Participants reported inadequate communication or follow-up from their child's educator after the three aforementioned special education team meetings. Participants' advice for other parents was to be prepared for each meeting during the identification stage of the IEP process by having questions ready for the team.

The Truth: After Identification. The participants indicated that after children began receiving special education services there was great improvement in their children's skill development. Parents were also more comfortable approaching educators with concerns or updates on progress. For instance, several parents indicated that prior to identification, they would often wait for the teacher to bring up concerns about their child's progress. Bertha explained, "but we don't say nothing sometime because we wait for the teachers say something." After making the decision to have their children evaluated, and subsequently qualify for special education services, all four parents indicated they were more aware of their child's needs.

Overall, participants reported a positive relationship with their child's educator, but did not always feel like equal participants of the special education team. Parents indicated there was a lack of clarity of their child's IEP goals and who was servicing them. However, all four participants indicated that they were pleased with their child's progress.

With many unanswered questions, these parents shared that they do not have a full understanding of their child's disability, the special education process, or how to measure progress. Their stories provide insight on how educators can better engage parents in the special education process.

Focus Group #2: Elementary School Parents

Five African American women participated in the parent focus group. One of the women, Tonya, participated in two individual interviews and was one of the highlighted narratives in the previous section. Four participants had children in pre-K through grade five that were diagnosed with a disability and had received special education services in a public-school setting. One of the participants, Lina, had a child receiving special education services in a non-public special education setting. Non-public settings for students with disabilities are typically funded by the local school district when a child's needs cannot be adequately met by the public school. The focus group took place in a mutually agreeable location in the county where all participants resided.

All five women in the second focus group had African American/Black male children receiving special education services in elementary school. Autumn, a special education consultant, has a son with a disability diagnosis of developmental delay (DD). Carla, a school district administrator, shares guardianship for a male child with autism

and a learning disability (LD) diagnosis. Professor Lina, a nurse, has a son that has a disability diagnosis of autism and emotional disability (ED).

Talia, a lead school counselor, has a son with a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and a learning disability (LD). Tonya, an academic intervention specialist, has two sons; both were diagnosed with speech delays and one has a second diagnosis of ADHD. Table 4.3 provides an overview of the demographics of the focus group participants:

Table 4.3
Focus Group #2 Demographics

Participant	Age	Education	Race/Ethnicity	Child's Grade(s)	Child's Diagnosis
Tonya	47	Master's	African American	K 2	• Speech • Speech/ADHD
Autumn	36	Master's	Black	pre-K	• Speech Delay
Lina	44	Doctorate	Black	3	• Autism • Emotional (ED)
Talia	55	Master's	Black	2	• Learning (LD)
Carla	45	Master's	Black	5	• Learning (LD) • Autism

Awareness and Understanding of Child's Disability/Diagnosis. All five participants indicated they had to make a difficult decision to pursue special education services so that their children could be successful. Only one parent reported that the school reached out to her about her child's lack of progress. Other parents became aware of delays in their child's progress by comparisons with their siblings or peers, or conversations with family or friends. Lina shared,

> *Mine started when my son was about three and a half. I realized that he was not progressing the way he should-particularly with speech. So, I did have him tested*

through Child Find…. He was not initially tested for autism. That happened later on.

All but one of the participants initiated the special education process when their child was attending an early learning center (pre-K) or elementary school level (K-5). Talia reported that she was surprised to receive a call from school about her son, Noah's difficulties in math, but knew something was wrong and consented to testing. Talia shared that Noah was later diagnosed with a specific learning disability in math as well as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Talia believes Noah was appropriately diagnosed and received good support from his educators as a result.

Special Education Process. All parents in the focus group discussed their experiences as Black women educators of children with disabilities. One particular theme that resonated during the interview was parent knowledge/advocacy. Participants shared that some parents may not understand the special education process and lack resources to get their children's needs met. All five participants agreed that inequitable treatment and service delivery based on race and socio-economic status is a critical challenge that they have personally faced in their places of employment and in their child's school. Carla asserted,

I believe it has a lot to do culturally what you bring to the table and sometimes those teachers are trying to make the kids fit in to what they understand and what their lived experiences are versus you know what's right before them.

Three of the participants indicated the necessity of advocating for their children and were able to articulate thoughts about special education law and district policy. Two

participants indicated they solicited the support of advocates when needed. All five participants stressed the necessity of parents' voices in the special education process.

The Beginning: Before Identification. All five of the parents in the group were actively involved in their child's education, initiated relationships (i.e., administrators, counselors, teachers, etc.), and communicated regularly with staff. Talia reported positive experiences with staff prior to her child's identification for special education and credits her visibility and involvement as a factor. In addition, Talia met with educators prior to formal meetings and felt that she received a clear understanding of her child's suspected disability and the special education process. Talia, unlike most of the other participants, felt like a respected member of the special education team.

Unfortunately, when Talia's family moved to a different town Noah transferred schools. The transition to a new school district made the special education journey even more challenging and Talia felt disconnected and out of the loop. Talia considered herself a strong advocate for Noah. Although she was not completely comfortable with the climate and politics of the new school, Talia held the school team accountable for Noah's progress.

Three of the participants shared experiences of parents getting superior treatment during special education team meetings based on their level of advocacy or litigiousness. Carla shared,

> *I think it's sad, but I think that teachers respond and provide more to children whose parents they know are going to hold them accountable. So, if you are not an active and involved parent, I think it's very easy for your child to fall through the cracks.*

Furthermore, two participants reported having difficulty getting their children identified for special education and had to "fight" with educators even when there was data to support the need.

The Light: During Identification. Two of the five participants reported positive experiences during their child's special education identification process. Although all of the participants worked in education, prior to their child's eligibility, they had limited knowledge about the special education process. Participants relied on their outside resources (e.g., coworkers, education websites, literature, etc.) to gain a deeper understanding of the special education process. In addition, participants indicated they felt comfortable reaching out to their child's special education team (i.e., case manager, assistant principal, etc.) to clarify looming questions.

Two participants expressed concern that the special education team did not consistently follow-up to ensure parents fully understand the special education process. The two parents with less favorable experiences indicated that they felt the identification process lacked transparency and the team had made decisions without considering their child's needs or the parent's perspective. Furthermore, these two parents felt like they were not treated as equal team players.

The Truth: After Identification. All five of the participants shared that there were often questions left unanswered, and in some cases, inadequate service delivery after their children began receiving special education services. Talia had an overall positive experience with Noah's educators and felt there was open communication and positive collaboration in most of her interactions. Once she moved to a new city and transferred schools, she began to see a decline in her son's performance.

There was a gap in special education services and little data from educators to show his progress.

Three participants reported that although the IEP was in place and well written, at times educators responsible for providing services and accommodations were either not knowledgeable or lacked resources to meet their child's needs. Lina asserted,

> *I was just seeing a lot of things that was not in place because they (educators) didn't have the knowledge that I saw. They didn't have the resources and the staff. I mean, you have an autism program in your school, but you have a part time O.T. (occupational therapist). Go figure...So, I worked hard. I worked hard with other agencies.*

All of the participants in the aforementioned focus group shared their successes and struggles of advocating for their children to receive appropriate academic and social-emotional support.

The participants accepted that their child had a disability and worked diligently to get the best education possible to meet their needs. All five participants shared that educators' lack of knowledge of their child's disability and service delivery (after identification) were major issues that caused them frustration. The group identified inequities in education, specifically resources for special education. Discussions of social class, race, and educator bias resonate from the focus group and have implications for how school systems address cultural competence.

Focus Group Interview Analysis

The participants in both focus groups shared their challenges and successes related to the education of their children with disabilities. Parents wanted their children

to receive appropriate educational opportunities, but differed in their knowledge and resources. One significant difference noted between participants in the two focus groups was the majority of the women in the second group worked in the field of education. However, their employment in the field of education did not mean these women experienced less challenges. The data clearly indicated that eight of the nine participants in both focus groups faced challenges on how to navigate the special education process and getting adequate support for their children. This has implications for how policymakers and school leaders allocate resources to ensure that children with disabilities have an appropriate education.

Educators in the second focus group (educators) knew it was best to conduct their own research and found out whom to talk to get their questions answered. The participants in the first focus group (early learning center) depended on early intervention specialists such as members of Child Find and the disabilities coordinator to support them as they navigated the special education process. The key themes that emerged from the focus group interviews were parent advocacy; educator cultural competence; educator knowledge and resources; and parent/teacher partnership.

Based on these preliminary findings, educators and parents need to improve their knowledge of the needs of children with disabilities and how best to support them. Educators are ultimately responsible for carrying out the goals on the student's IEP, but the most important team players, the parents, may feel left out of the educational process. Participants had different experiences in partnering with their child's school, but all indicated that partnership in the special education process is necessary for improved student outcomes. Educators' knowledge of students' disability as well as

communicating this information was a concern of many participants. In both focus groups, issues of race and culture were noted as important factors to how parents viewed their child's disability. Some participants indicated that educator awareness and understanding of students' and parents' background, interests, and needs were necessary to ensure students had positive learning outcomes. In Chapter V, the researcher will further discuss the aforementioned key themes and the implications for educators.

Comparison of Emerging Themes Across Participants

Data gathered from all participants provided insight into the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities in grades pre-K through 5. The study answered the following research question and two sub-questions:

> What do the narratives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities tell about child and parental experiences with educators during the primary school years?
>
> 1. What do these parents' stories reveal about student and family engagement practices at their child's school?
> 2. What can educators learn from culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities in order to improve cultural responsiveness?

In this section, selected data from interviews will be presented according to research questions and emergent themes within or across individual interviews and focus groups (Clandinin & Connely, 2000).

Overall findings from individual and focus group interviews revealed four emergent themes across interviewees:

1. Educators need to develop cultural competence to improve relationships with CLD students and their parents.
2. Educators need to improve parent engagement and partnership in the special education process.
3. Educators and parents need to enhance their knowledge of the special education process.
4. Parents need to enhance their knowledge of the special education process so they can become better advocates for their children with disabilities.

Figure four provides an overview of the themes, research questions, and literature source:

Coding Category	Definition	Research Question	Literature Source(s)
Educators' Cultural Competence	• Identifying and addressing biases. • Getting to know students and their families. • Understanding students' likes, strengths, needs. • Cultural reciprocity	What can educators learn from culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities in order to improve cultural responsiveness?	Blanchett, 2014; Ford, et al., 2017; Gaye, 2010)
Parent Engagement and Partnership	• Involving parents in school/class events and decisions. • Parent is valued team member. • Preparation for IEP team meeting. • Transparency about child's needs and IEP process.	What do these parents' stories reveal about student and family engagement practices at their child's school?	Francis, et al., 2017; Irvine, 2011;Harry 2008
Educator Knowledge and Resources	• Understanding children's strengths and needs. • Understanding and articulating the IEP process to parents. • Access to quality resources	What do the narratives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities tell about child and parental experiences with educators during the primary school years?	Harry & Klingner, 2014
Parent Knowledge and Advocacy	• Understanding children's needs. • Understanding the IEP process. • Quality resources/ adequate services.	What do these parents' stories reveal about student and family engagement practices at their child's school?	Stanley, 2015; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015

Figure 4: Themes, definitions, research questions, and literature source

Research Questions and Themes

What do the narratives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities tell about child and parental experiences with educators during the primary school years?

Research Sub-question #1: What can educators learn from culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities in order to improve cultural responsiveness?

Educator's Need to Develop Cultural Competence to Improve Relationships with CLD students and their Parents. Inequitable treatment of CLD students with disabilities in the special education process is of great concern (Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009; Blanchett, 2014). During the individual interviews (n=6), all but one participant mentioned experiencing what they described as unfair or bias treatment from their child's school staff. The participants in the focus group, specifically African American parents, shared in detail experiences and perspectives related to what they considered inequitable treatment of their children.

Talia shared that in the district where she works the staff were required to take cultural competency training due to the growing diversity of students. Furthermore, many schools in the district faced scrutiny because of the high number of Black and Hispanic students being referred for expulsion and special education. Talia disclosed, *"some of the things that we've been told—and not just me, but other parents in our school…It's just bias!"* Tonya conceded, "*I just think they need some training… because some of the things that they say to parents…No one should say them. But it's just a matter of the culture of the school."*

A teacher reported her suspicion that Tonya's youngest child had autism because he did not initiate conversations with other children and appeared withdrawn. Tonya reported the offense because she felt the teacher's diagnosis was based on prejudice.

Participants' stories indicate that educators and service providers need to develop cultural competence and avoid misinterpreting CLD students' behaviors that often lead to misdiagnosed disabilities (Ford, 2012). This finding is consistent with the literature on race, culture, and disabilities that sheds light on the need to improve outcomes for CLD children with disabilities (Blanchett, 2014; Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2010).

Positive Relationships. Participants revealed that building relationships with educators at school was critical to children's success. This finding is consistent with scholars who stress the importance of positive home-school relationships (Epstein, 2009; Khalifa, 2012; Turnbull et al., 2011). Considering different philosophies and perspectives when educating children was important to study participants. Carla posited,

> *"I think for any parent it's a good idea to establish a relationship with the teacher from the start, regardless of whether or not your child has been identified…you as a parent have information and know things about your child…"*

In some cases, parents revealed conflict between home and school that resulted from inequitable treatment of their children. Joanna explained that Charles insisted the school staff did not like him, which was evident in differential treatment compared to his peers. She asserted:

> *…He felt like nobody was on his side. You have an eight-year-old trying to take up for himself against people in their late 20's… It's not a fair match and that's how he felt. He didn't have that support…They didn't listen to him. They never*

heard his voice…Don't hold a grudge against him…Do your job teaching him. That's the right thing to do… instead of bashing him and accusing him even for things he didn't do.

There were many stories that participants shared about educators who were not welcoming and/or did not communicate effectively with CLD parents. However, several parents reported feeling happy with some of their children's educators. Participants shared experiences of educators who genuinely tried to build relationships with the child and family. Bertha shared,

It's like the relationship that the teacher has with a child...like when the child comes to the center. Like…good morning… giving a hug…Starting in the morning. So that they will get to know that child and we can feel welcome.

Talia shared that one of Noah's teachers went "over and beyond" to ensure he had what was needed to be successful in the classroom. Talia recalled instances of the teacher reaching out to find out how best to engage and motivate Noah. The teacher was willing to "dig deeper" to find out about the family customs, values, interests, and how to partner for the benefit of the child.

So, I stressed to them, "you must, you must, you must prompt him or if he starts—if you're noticing that he's missing a lot of material—a lot of work, then please reach out to me. I know he was doing the work because that was the only way he could have any privileges at home. We had a little system.

Participants agreed that when their child's educators were willing to engage the student and parents, the child and parent felt valued by the educator. When educators did not take

the time to get to know students and their parents, misinterpretations of behaviors occurred that lead to disengagement and conflict.

Parents are likely to feel unwelcome in a school building where educators appear disinterested in learning about students' strengths, interests, and needs (Garraway & Robinson, 2017). Joanna and Lina believed their sons' behaviors were escalated due to the lack of relationship they had with school staff. Other participants agreed that when their child's educator appeared to be committed to ensuring that all students were successful, parents felt more inclined to partner and be involved with the school staff. Jeslyn concluded,

> *You gotta' get the right person. Some people are not in it to help people. They're just in it cause it's like a job. You know, their eight hours and then they go home. But then it's people that are actually doing it because they love it. So, you got to get that right person.*

Educators who consider innovative ways to engage CLD parents in their child's education are better able to build trusting relationships (Rossetti et al., 2017). Participants' stories indicate that educators' cultural competence was necessary for the development of positive relationships. Educators will need to take the time to get to know and understand the families they work with in order to develop cultural competence (Rossetti, et al., 2017).

Research Sub-question #2: What do these parents' stories reveal about student and family engagement practices at their child's school?

Educator's Need to Engage and Partner with CLD Parents. Participants indicated that partnerships between school and home are crucial to supporting children

with disabilities. During the focus group, one participant asserted, *"I think that it's helpful for any parent whether their child has been diagnosed with a disability or not, to establish a partnership with the teacher very early on."* All 13 participants (individual interviews and focus groups) stressed that they wanted to feel respected during the special education process. Participants stressed the need to break down barriers and make all team members feel like partners in the special education process. Developing trusting relationships and partnering with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families has been found to have a positive impact on the success of their children (Khalifa, 2012; Rosetti et al., 2017).

The Hispanic participants stressed the importance of making sure that speakers of other languages are full participants and understand the process fully. For instance, all participants (focus group #1) were bilingual, but indicated that it would be ideal for parents to bring a friend or interpreter to meetings in the event they need extra support. Isabella (focus group #1) shared that parents should come back to the table if they are not clear on what happened in a previous meeting to ensure they have clarity. Participants agreed that the special education process could be difficult for some to understand even if meetings are conducted in their native language. Isabella asserted,

> *…Have another meeting. So, they can have like a follow-up. Like what things you need to understand and what things you need to be clear. And then also sometimes it can be the language because maybe the parent didn't have a translator. Because sometime they got zero English*.

This has implications for how special education teams work with and support CLD parents to ensure they are full partners in the special education process.

Educators and Parents Need Knowledge of the Special Education Process

Parent Knowledge. Six of the participants learned about their child's disability and resources on their own and did not feel school staff spent enough time trying to educate them. Furthermore, the aforementioned parents learned about out-of-school resources to support their children through colleagues, friends, or outside organizations. Jeslyn asserted,

> *...If they don't know that you know—they'll just let the child slide by. So, for me it was the sense of being educated and knowing…I knew something was wrong and that there was something more that I can do for my child than just sending them to school. I think that a lot of other cultures don't think, don't even know, that there's an IEP, that there's these services out there.*

Six of the participants could not clearly articulate their child's disability diagnosis or the goals on the IEP. Furthermore, seven of the parents were not able to explain whom their child's service providers (e.g., occupational therapist, speech pathologist, etc.) were and indicated limited contact with them. The parents in the second focus group (African American educators) had a better understanding of their child's needs and IEP goals compared to parents in the first focus group. Yet, all 13 participants experienced some barriers and challenges navigating the special education process and learning how best to address their child's disability. Carla explained, "*... I don't think the school did a great job helping me before the meeting. I think I just happened to know things as someone with a background in education."* A critical issue that need further investigation is how school teams can better educate and prepare parents for the special education process so that they can be informed participants and advocates for their children.

Parent Advocacy. Participants stressed the importance of parents learning about their child's needs, the special education process, and their rights so they can become better advocates. Some participants indicated waiting for the educators to bring up conversations regarding their child's delayed development, but in hindsight, wished they had initiated support earlier. Jeslyn's family discouraged her from seeking special education services because they assumed speaking two languages in the home was causing the delays. Jeslyn shared, "*my family was like, 'Oh he's bilingual, that's why he's delayed it's because he's learning both English and Spanish…You know, just speak one language primarily and then he'll catch on.''* Jeslyn recognized being bilingual was not the reason for her son's delays and sought help despite what her family suggested. Early intervention was an important factor that participants concluded was needed for student success. Participants suggested that a new parent to the special education process or those with questions, need to ask questions from peers or school staff.

Participants in both focus groups indicated that if educators were unhelpful, parents needed to familiarize themselves with school officials at the central/district office level to seek assistance. Lina shared that she experienced resistance from her son's school team to provide adequate services as identified in his IEP. Lina contacted the Office of Civil Rights, went to the county executive's office, and was interviewed on the news about her experience. Carla shared that she paid for an educational and psychological assessment before the school system would entertain her request to change the disability code on the IEP. She was told the school staff did not see the same concerns as the parents. Carla explained,

…he needed to get tested and the school really was not responding as quickly. So, we paid for outside testing and then took the results to the school. And then they changed the diagnosis on his IEP.

There was agreement among participants that parents need to be prepared to "fight" for their kids to receive appropriate educational opportunities. Tonya asserted,

I know I probably seem like I am the hammer because I'm a PTA mom and we all talk and we know what our kids need and what their getting… I know my kid. My kid needs a little bit extra. I'm not asking you to go above and beyond your job. Well, I do want you to go above and beyond (chuckles) but, I want you to do your job.

Several participants indicated that they moved across county lines or changed schools to obtain adequate educational services for their children. Talia shared being tired of dealing with an "antiquated" school system and decided to sell her house and move to a more reputable county in order for her son to receive better special education services. She explained,

I shouldn't have had to pick up and move to every county to get what I needed. You know I feel like I have to work with them, but I feel like there should be something that we can do is as a community and as parents to lead. You know—to help our counties along in what they're providing to our students.

Elise shared that a friend informed her of the best schools and the cost of housing in certain neighborhoods so that she could make an informed educational decision. There were a plethora of barriers that caused participants to move in order to obtain better special education services for their children. Elise asserted,

There is a lot of barriers… once you figure out, you know, if you think something is going on where you live. Depending on the county that you live in, unfortunately, that's the type of service you'll get.

Participants shared that the barriers to quality education were: (a) school team's resistance to screen and assess students for special education; (b) lack of parent engagement and poor home-school relationships; and (c) lack of educator knowledge and resources. This has implications for how school teams respond to and address the needs of parents of students with disabilities. Furthermore, participants conceded that providing quality, equitable educational opportunities based on students' needs and IEP goals are critical to their success.

Educator Knowledge and Resources. Five of the participants expressed disappointments with the service delivery after children were identified for special education. At some point in their journey, eight of the participants questioned whether their child's general and special educators had the knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively meet students' needs.

Autumn provided valuable insight regarding her experiences with special education teams:

There are many educators that don't understand 504 plans nor IEPs. They have no idea what they're doing and a lot of teachers they get attitudes when they receive students, especially with IEPs because they like, "that is more work" and they depend on the special ed teachers or the resource, you know, staff to come and pull the kids. To make sure they're getting their hours. So, that really is disturbing, but you see it a lot."

Lina realized that her son's school staff was not knowledgeable about working with children on the autism spectrum and requested a non-public school placement that was paid for by the school district. Lina shared,

> *I'm like, if this is an autism program that's what they do. He is going to have meltdowns. He is going to try to elope. They just couldn't get it. They just didn't have the resources. They didn't even have the understanding… I'm like, wow!"*

Eight of the parents were surprised that the educators who were hired to meet the needs of their children were not always knowledgeable about their specific disability. Participants' stories reveal that educators need to enhance their knowledge of students with disabilities and seek resources to help students experience success (Tran, 2014; Warren-Miller, 2016). Furthermore, the lack of resources and communication among the educators working with their children raises the question about pre-service and in-service preparation. Tonya described her experience:

> *I'm just emotional because this is just not right… So, now I'm at home doing double duty…You can't just leave a [cusp] kid in the middle of the road and expect him to push himself. You have to do your part as well. So, now I'm doing double duty at home for the summer and I'm like, 'this isn't right'… I am really angry that there are not more things put in place and it's just not my kid. It's a lot of the kids like that. But see, other parents don't know because they're not educators. They have no idea what is going on in these classrooms.*

Educator Professional Development. Most participants shared that their child's educators did an inadequate job of explaining the special education process or following

up after meetings and testing to ensure parents understood. Furthermore, parents were not always clear on how special education team decisions would ultimately impact their child.

Elise expressed her frustration when her child's teacher approached her with concerns about learning and behavioral challenges, but could not clearly explain why she was being referred for a special education assessment. Instead, Elise was asked to follow-up with the school's special education coordinator. When educators are not clear on the special education process or are not able to clearly articulate it, parents can become frustrated, angry, and confused. A lack of understanding can ultimately impact parental partnership in the special education process and cause them to be withdrawn or make uninformed decisions.

The question of educator professional development emerged during individual interviews and focus groups. One participant asked, "when do you train these teachers (laughing by group)? You know, when do they debrief and talk about what's going on every week with these children?" During the second focus group (African American) participants discussed what professional development looked like in their child's school setting or counties where they taught. Lina explained,

> *In non-public, like…So they're, they're doing it. They had these staff development every, you know, twice a month or three times a month. You know they let the kids out early it's just part of the schedule. And they're doing the staff development where they're training. They're constantly working on the kids IEPs and stuff like that. If the county school can do something like that —it will really, really, help.*

The participants' ideas on how to improve education for their children have implications for how educators engage and partner with parents to include them in school-wide planning and decision-making. The participants recognized the importance of professional development for general and special educators in order to better serve children with disabilities. Carla concluded:

> *I personally feel that all teachers regardless of whether or not you are a special educator should have some training on how to work with students with special needs. Because I feel like our classrooms are changing so much that regardless of whether or not you were trained, as a special educator you are going to at some point in your career have students in your classroom who have special needs.*

As previously stated, the changing demographics in U.S. schools means that educators will need additional training on cultural competence to truly meet the needs of all students. Furthermore, the increase of CLD students in schools will require educators to have a clear understanding of differences related to cultural norms versus disability (Ford, 2012).

The Collaborative Story

Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to gain in-depth knowledge of participants' experiences by allowing them to freely tell their stories in a safe, respectful, and collaborative process. Participants' stories are retold in this paper using fictionalization to protect their identity while authentically representing their experience (Caine, et al., 2017). "This purpose of fictionalizing is, in part at least, an attempt to keep the author/researcher safe from being too vulnerable, too exposed (p. 219). Furthermore, fictionalization of the experience may be beneficial to the participant and researcher since

it allows distance between them and their experiences, "a way to engage in imagination that enriches inquiry spaces and research understandings" (p. 219).

Key quotes from participant's journal entries, focus group data, and individual interviews were analyzed and used to create a fictional, but faithful, story about their experiences. Each participant was given the opportunity to read and offer feedback on their individual stories as well as the compilation of their stories into one final product. Doing this provided the researcher with the assurance that the researchers' analysis was accurate and allowed participants to feel empowered in the co-composition of their stories. The researcher's purpose in recreating participants' stories was to engage the reader in "assessable ways that promote understanding, an opening for different possibilities" (Caine, 2017, p. 219). Following is a fictional letter that represents a compilation of stories told by the participants.

Joy Whatley

17117 Parkside Drive

Waukegan, Michigan 12383

December 1, 2018

Dear Mrs. Whatley:

It was nice meeting you at the Parent Teacher Association Meeting last week. We have worked hard to build positive relationships and to partner with our children's educators to improve outcomes for our children. Our PTA has invited guests from the school as well as the community to speak with our parents on topics of interest. This quarter, our PTA professional development committee planned workshops and other activities with the school's administration and special education department to enhance the understanding of staff and parents on the special education process. I hope you enjoyed the special education team's presentation to our parents. You have joined the PTA at a good time.

As promised, I am enclosing a list of resources that I hope will help as you prepare for the upcoming special education screening meeting for your son. As you know, I have a son in second grade and a daughter in kindergarten, who receive special education services at Wakeland Elementary School. If you would like to meet prior to your son's special education screening meeting, let me know. There are other parents that are active members of the PTA that would be happy to share additional resources and offer you support. My husband and I were extremely blessed because there were so many things I was able to take advantage of because I had a little bird in my ears.

At the meeting you shared that you were lost and did not feel you had enough resources or support to assist you at home and school. It shouldn't be if you're lucky then you have access. It should be readily available. I guess I wish there was like a "one stop shop." Not a lot of Black people know about the services available to help them with their kids with disabilities. I mean, the person that referred me for outside therapy was a White woman. That's how I happened to find out about it–through her. It makes me sad that other Black and Hispanic families just don't have access and knowledge about these free resources. I think it is hindering us not having the access.

I also suggest that you ask your child's teacher or the special educator to meet if you have questions before your screening meeting. You don't know how many times when my daughter was diagnosed that I kept texting the teacher. *How's she doing? How's this?* I was calling. *How's her progress?* I'm the one that e-mails, calls, harasses, whatever. Yes, I am very involved! My neighbor, Isabella, expressed frustration about navigating the special education process. She was not getting clear answers on how to help her daughter. She didn't even understand the disability diagnosis at first. She went along with testing because the school kept contacting her about her daughter's behaviors. She decided to let them test her because she thought there might also be a language delay. Isabella is very pleased with the services her daughter is receiving, but she still doesn't know who the service providers are and what their roles are. My advice to you is to not let anyone push you into to something if you do not understand.

On the other hand, there are many parents at this school whose children really needed the services, but there was a delay or resistance getting what they need. My friend Autumn said that she had an IEP meeting to develop goals and it took five months to

receive the finalized document! That is unacceptable and against the law. Make sure you understand timelines related to your child's special education process. Chelsea, another parent on the PTA board, said that her daughter received compensatory services because she was supposed to be getting special education services regularly and somebody dropped the ball! Her daughter ended up receiving an outside tutor to make up for the time missed.

Tonya, the PTA president, shared that she had a conflict with a general education teacher who was not willing to go the extra mile to help her son who has a disability. It's like the general education teachers think it's not their job to help kids who struggle! Once they get the IEP some of the teacher's don't help the kids like they should and put all the work on the special educator. In some cases, the special educator may not clearly articulate what the general educator or the parent can do to support the child.

Another concern that a couple of parents shared at a PTA meeting was the increase in suspensions within the school system for children with disabilities in elementary school. One parent stressed her frustration with multiple suspensions of her son with Autism in kindergarten. There is a disproportionate number of Black children with disabilities being suspended compared to their White peers. There is a need to promote a holistic educational approach to better serve students from diverse backgrounds.

All of these stories make me wonder what kind of training these teachers receive before and after graduation from college. Hence, the PTA is collaborating with administrators on providing learning opportunities for staff and parents to enhance their understanding of the special education process. The goal is to engage and partner with

parents from diverse backgrounds who have children with disabilities. We would love to have you join our professional development committee.

During out last countywide PTA special education fair, we were able to interview many of the attendees. Following are key suggestions that we received from parents that have gone through the special education process:

Before Formal Identification

1. Discuss concerns with your child's pediatrician.
2. If you think your child has a disability, communicate with the teacher.
3. Parents can self-refer to Child Find, a local referral source for screening children with cognitive, behavior, and medical concerns.
4. Once contact is made with the school's special education team, keep pushing so that the child gets a screening meeting. Keep a log. Keep your emails.
5. Speak up and talk! If you think something is not working, you need to speak up.
6. Do your research on the free support groups and services that are available out there.
7. Communication is key. Keep the lines of communication open with the educators.

During Identification (Screening, Assessments, IEP Development)

1. Communication is key. Keep the lines of communication open with the educators. Have a list of questions written out (e.g., type of services; hours; case manager; special education setting/location, etc.)
2. Read the IEP. Highlight it. Ask questions.

3. When the team provides you with the special education *Parental Rights and Responsibilities Handbook,* look through it and make them accountable.
4. There are free special education resources on the United States Department of Education website. You may also check the state website for local resources.
5. There may be free or low-cost advocacy services that support parents at special education meetings. Check the state or county special education website.

After Identification: Service Delivery

1. Speak up for your child and stay involved. Ask questions.
2. Contact the teacher prior to the start of school. Share certain things about your child that will help them get to know your child's interest, strengths, needs.
3. Communication is key. Keep the lines of communication open with the educators.
4. Once the teachers realize you are on your "p's and q's" they will give you and your child more attention. Advocate for your child!

Further information about special education law and parent resources are available on the United States' Department of Education's website (https://sites.ed.gov/idea/parents-families/). I look forward to seeing you at our next PTA meeting!

All the best,

Lanette Wright
Lanette Wright

PTA Professional Development Committee Liaison

The researcher found that collaboratively re-creating participant stories through fictionalization was an enlightening experience. To ensure the letter was comprehensible, a qualitative coach read a draft of the fictional letter and provided feedback. "…The narrative writer has an available test, that is, to have another participant read the account and to respond…" This allows a researcher to assess the invitational quality of a manuscript…" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.6). In addition, the dialogic partnership between researcher and participant allowed an opportunity to capture participant voices and to ensure credibility in the collaborative storytelling process. Furthermore, engaging parents as equal partners in the re-storying process served as a tool to empower them as advocates for their children with disabilities.

Summary

In this chapter, data from six individual narrative interviews and two focus group interviews were highlighted and analyzed. Findings from the aforementioned interviews revealed four emergent themes: (1) educators need to develop cultural competence to improve relationships with CLD students and their parents; (2) educators need to improve engagement and partnership in the special education process; and (3) educators and parents need to enhance their knowledge of the special education process. Participants' collaborative stories were retold (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) using various key quotes in the form of a fictional letter (Caine, et al., 2017). In Chapter V, an overview of the study, methods, and discussion of findings will be presented. Additionally, implications for school leaders, educators, and parents will be discussed.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities on the child and parental experience with educators during the preschool and elementary grades (pre-K through fifth grade). The goal of this study was to elucidate the challenges, barriers, and successes faced by these parents and their children. Through the use of narrative inquiry, one research question with two sub-questions were explored in this study:

What do the narratives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities tell about child and parental experiences with educators during the primary years?

1. What do these parents' stories reveal about student and family engagement practices at their child's school?
2. What can educators learn from culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities in order to improve cultural responsiveness?

Through narrative interviews, focus groups, and journal reflections, participants shared their experiences of navigating the special education process. A purposive sample of 13 parents (combined individual interviewees and focus group attendees) was selected for participation in the study. The narratives of six selected participants were highlighted in Chapter Four. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study and methodology. Next, I discuss findings and study implications. I close with my lens as a practitioner and offer recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Study

Statistics show that racial minority groups are outnumbering White students in public schools (McFarland, 2017). According to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), less than 50% of U.S. students attending public schools in 2017 were White (2017). Out of 50.7 million U.S. students in grades pre-K through 12th grade, 26.3 million were racial minorities, with Black (8.0 million) and Hispanic (13.6 million) students representing the highest population of racial minorities (McFarland). As the demographics of U.S. public schools rapidly change, the number of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students identified for special education will continue to increase (Bethea & Stevenson, 2017).

Some scholars question the preparation (i.e., pre-service and in-service professional development) of a predominately White teaching force to work effectively with CLD students (Chu & Garcia, 2014; Gay, 2010; Harry & Klinger, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Tran (2014) posits that White middle-class standards of educating students often comes along with prejudice and can negatively impact relationships with students and their families. Furthermore, Harry and Klinger (2006) in their seminal work on CLD students in special education found that at the school and classroom level, there was a lack of preparation of staff to work effectively with CLD children and their parents. For years, the aforementioned issues have been inadequately addressed which negatively impacts outcomes for many CLD youth with disabilities (Ford et al., 2017; Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

The family engagement conceptual framework provided a lens for exploring participants' experiences as they navigated the special education process. Epstein's

(1995) theory of school, family, and community partnerships; The Maryland Family Engagement Framework (2016); and Turnbull et al.'s (2011) Family System's Framework provided important perspectives on engaging families and other invested stakeholders in the education of children. An extensive review of the literature focused on topics such as race and disability; cultural competence; and family engagement in special education. Effort was made to find literature related to the engagement and partnership of African American and Hispanic parents of children with disabilities.

Overview of the Methods

Qualitative methodology was chosen for this study to gain in-depth knowledge of the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents of children with disabilities during the primary years. Parents of students with disabilities participated in this study and provided detailed data on the pre-K through fifth grade experience. The descriptive narrative method (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1988) involved the collection of data through individual narrative interviews, focus groups, and journal reflections.

A purposive sample of Black and Hispanic parents was desired for the study. Permission was obtained to conduct the study with parents affiliated with non-public special education schools, parent organizations, and early learning centers that serve a high population of Black and Hispanic students. Thirteen parents of children identified with disabilities were selected to participate in the study (combination of individual interviewees and focus group participants). Parent participants had children with disabilities ranging from pre-K through fifth grade. The parents of pre-K students attended a separate early learning center for pre-school aged students. Children in grades

K-5 attended elementary schools. Signed permission for audio recording of the sessions was obtained from participants prior to interviews. Individual interviews lasted 45-60 minutes and focus groups lasted 60-75 minutes each.

Narrative inquiry involves the researcher collaborating with participants while allowing them opportunities to relive their experiences and share their stories. Hence, narrative research is a recursive, cyclical process with an ongoing revelation of understanding (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thirteen adult participants were engaged in narrative interviews that allowed them to share their experiences and that of their children. I listened to each audiotape and read transcripts multiple times. After, I engaged in several coding cycles to determine themes. An excel spreadsheet was created to organize data. An expert in qualitative data management offered support by reviewing the spreadsheet, data analysis chart, and providing feedback.

Data from journals, individual interviews, and focus group interviews were used to re-tell participants' stories. The six participants selected for individual narrative interviews were sent their personal stories to check for accuracy. The parents that participated in the focus groups were sent the key themes that emerged from the data and asked for feedback. Participants' collaborative stories were retold (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) using various key quotes in the form of a fictional letter (Caine, et al., 2017).
A comparison of emerging themes across participants was discussed in Chapter Four. Overall, data from individual and focus group interviews revealed findings that suggest:

1. Educators need to improve cultural competence in order to build better relationships with and to serve culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities and their parents.

2. Parent-educator partnerships in the special education process are important for student success.
3. Educators who are knowledgeable about the needs of their students and get to know them and their parents are better able to support them.
4. Educators need to ensure that parents have a clear understanding of the special education process.
5. Parents' knowledge of the special education process helps them to better advocate for their children and allows them to be more engaged in their children's education.

Summary of Findings

In Chapter IV participant narratives, study findings, and analysis of key themes were presented in detail. Below is a brief summary of the findings organized by research question.

Research Question: What do the narratives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities tell about child and parental experiences with educators during the primary years?

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents in this study shared their experiences before, during, and after their children were diagnosed with a disability. Many of the participants shared that their children had progressed well as a result of receiving special education services, but how they got to the point of satisfaction differed for each participant. Findings from individual interviews, focus groups, and journals indicate that navigating the special education process was at times frustrating for all parents during their journey. At the time of the interviews, some parents were enduring

new obstacles in their journey while others testified that they were finally at a place of contentment. Inconsistency in relationships with their child's educators and questions about adequate service delivery presented a great deal of stress for these parents. For instance, most of their children had new teachers and/or administrators every school year. For some, the lack of communication meant that transitions may not always be smooth for their children.

All thirteen parents shared that at some point during the special education process they felt like an unwelcome participant in their child's education. Twelve of the participants felt this way because there were no clear explanations of the process before, during, or after identification. Eleven of the participants felt they did not have clarity of their child's disability or the services that would be provided to help them. The majority of the participants shared that their child's special education process was not seamless and there were many instances after meetings that they were left without support. Eleven of the parents shared they did not have a "voice" and felt the process was arduous.

The level of parental knowledge and engagement in the special education process determined whether or not parents "went along with the team" or stood their ground and advocated if they were not in agreement. Many participants spent countless hours trying to advocate for their child to receive quality services because educators lacked resources, time, or adequate knowledge and skills. Parents of pre-K students appeared to be less knowledgeable about the special education process, which may be due to the short amount of time their children had been receiving services compared to the elementary parents. However, parents with children in the pre-K program appeared to receive more

support from school staff compared to the elementary parents in this study once their child was identified for services.

The support system described by pre-K parents in this study could be unique to their center since there was an on-site special education coordinator. Furthermore, there were fewer children attending the pre-K program compared to schools attended by the elementary students. Overall, parents of students in both the pre-K program and the elementary schools reported that the general and special educators were not always easy to communicate with and they often felt isolated in their child's educational process.

Awareness and acceptance of their child's disability diagnosis varied by participant. Some participants expressed confusion and frustration as they tried to make sense of their child's delays. Others knew from their professional work or observation of older siblings that the special education process needed to be initiated. Although tedious, participants explored resources and/or supports within and outside of schools to help them navigate the special education process. Some parents initiated the special education process and sought support after recognizing there were delays in the child's development. Other parents recognized there were delays, but felt their children would "grow out of it" and did not seek outside support. The parents who were non-educators were less likely to suspect something was wrong or were in denial until the school staff initiated the conversation.

Four of the participants indicated that cultural perspectives of disabilities played a big part in whether or not to pursue special education services. Parents shared that the most difficult part of acceptance was the perception of others. Participants tended to

value the opinion of family, but ultimately made the decision to move forward because they observed delays and wanted to get early intervention.

Participants indicated that the identification stage of the special education process was very challenging. Each participant shared feeling frustrated because the process was long; they had unanswered questions; and felt alone as they awaited the team's decision regarding their child's eligibility. Several participants noted three major meetings in which they felt confused: (a) screening meeting to determine if a disability was suspected; (b) formal assessment results; and (c) development of IEP goals. Twelve of the participants explained that educators could have done a better job explaining the special education process and walking them through each step to make sure they knew what would occur prior to meetings.

Participants reported inadequate communication or follow-up from their child's educator after special education team meetings. However, after making the decision to have their children evaluated, and subsequently qualify for special education services, some parents indicated feeling more confident the child would receive necessary supports. Yet, many of these parents were unable to articulate their child's disability or how educators measure progress. Furthermore, the majority of participants were not clear on what their child's IEP goals were or who was servicing them.

Parents who had positive experiences with staff credits their visibility and involvement as a factor. In addition, some parents met with educators on several occasions and received a clearer understanding of their child's progress and needs. In these cases, participants revealed that schools had the resources and staff to walk with them through the special education process.

Several parents shared less than desirable experiences with educators at the school and district level. These parents reported being met with resistance by their child's school team. For instance, the aforementioned participants faced serious challenges getting their children identified for special education and had to "fight" with educators even when there was data to support the need. Participants attributed the resistance to inadequate funding for appropriate resources and lack of educator knowledge and skill-set. Some parents felt obligated to move their families to another school district so that their children could receive adequate services.

Not surprising, the parents in the second focus group (educators) had a deeper understanding of the special education process and legal mandates that all school-aged children with disabilities are entitled to reasonable and adequate service. Primarily African American parents mentioned issues of equitable services and parental involvement for children with disabilities. The majority of the participants regardless of their race, educational background, or career, were strong advocates for their children. Participants' advice for other parents going through the special education process was to be prepared for meetings by having questions ready ahead of time and ensuring their voices are heard.

Research Sub-question #1: What do these parents' stories reveal about student and family engagement practices at their child's school?

How supported and engaged parents were throughout the special education process varied by participant. Some participants reported that they had encountered at least one educator who was knowledgeable about the special education process, engaged them as partners, and worked to ensure that their child's needs were met. In situations

where participants described efforts made by school staff to engage them, they felt empowered and like equal partners in their child's education.

Several participants reported having positive relationships with their child's educators but did not always feel like equal partners of the special education team. For instance, parents shared feeling "invisible" or like "outsiders" during special education team meetings and did not know what questions to ask. Other parents were intimidated by the professionals at the table and confused by the jargon used. Hence, five participants were uncertain of their role in the special education process and "went along" with the recommendations of the team without having full understanding of the disability, services, or placement. The parents who initiated the special education process "did their homework" and went to the special education meetings with questions about how to meet their child's needs.

All thirteen parents indicated that school staff did not prepare them on what to expect before the special education team meetings. When their child's educators initiated the special education process (referral) many of the parents indicated that school teams had already made decisions related to services and classroom placement without fully including them. Three of the participants shared felt the special education process was not transparent and suspected the team was withholding information or manipulating them to find out about their children instead of asking outright. Parents who initiated the special education process indicated they at times felt like unequal partners because of the lack of engagement and transparency in the process. All participants shared that at some point in their interactions with special education teams they had looming questions that were not adequately addressed. Furthermore, all but one participant reported a lack of follow-up by

staff. Participants shared that having the support of their child's educators or service providers by following up with a call or note would have made the process less stressful. In most cases, the participants had not heard from anyone at their child's school after meetings unless the parent-initiated contact.

The lack of engagement that some parents experienced made them question whether their child's educators really knew their children, understood their needs, and how to best support them. However, educators that collaborated with parents as equal partners in their child's education built trusting and strong relationships. These trusting relationships enabled parents to feel more comfortable in the learning environment and during meetings. Furthermore, parents who felt empowered were more likely to advocate so that their children's needs were addressed. Some participants indicated that educators' awareness and understanding of students' background was necessary to ensure students experienced positive outcomes.

Research Sub-question#2: What can educators learn from culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities in order to improve cultural responsiveness?

All nine of the Black and African American participants noted that educators' lack of cultural competence and inability to engage them in the special education process was concerning. All but one of the Black and African American participants initiated the referral for special education services. Parents who initiated a special education referral shared that they were prepared to do whatever it took to make sure their child's needs were met. The Black and African American participants shared that although society often marginalizes individuals with disabilities and children of color, they wanted their

children to receive the quality educational services they were entitled to. Three of the African American mothers shared that they had to "check" teachers or "put them in their place" when they tried to misdiagnose their children without accurate data or clear explanation.

Two Hispanic participants expressed feeling stressed about the lack of understanding and acceptance of children with disabilities in their culture. Several Hispanic parents in the study shared they had to grapple with whether or not delays in their child's development resulted from a disability or laziness. Two of the African American and Black parents indicated that they were hesitant to seek support for their children because of the stigma attached with being a Black male in special education. Despite their concerns with how their children would be perceived by family and friends, the aforementioned parents recognized delays in their child's development and agreed to have their child assessed for special education services. These parents indicated that early intervention was important and they wanted their children to have a quality education so they could experience success.

The lack of transparency in the special education process was a tremendous barrier to CLD parental engagement. For example, one of the parents reported that her child's classroom placement was changed without her knowledge. The parent demanded answers and was informed that staff wanted to better "accommodate" the child's needs since she was performing below peers academically and socially. The parent expressed her humiliation and anger because there was no consultation about the child's progress or the class change. Not having clear knowledge of their child's delays coupled with cultural influences, made it very difficult for some parents to consent to the referral process.

The majority of parents felt frustrated that educators had not taken enough time to get to know their children before making assumptions about their educational or social-emotional needs. Considering different philosophies, cultures, and perspectives when educating their children was important to study participants. Some parents considered the treatment they experienced by their child's educators as "biased" and culturally insensitive. Several participants shared that inequitable treatment and service delivery based on race and/or socio-economic status is a critical challenge that they witnessed or personally experienced at their child's school. Two of the parents with Black male children identified with emotional and behavioral disabilities reported that staff mistreated their children. The parents attributed the mistreatment to lack of educator knowledge, cultural differences in discipline, and bias. These participants revealed that the mistreatment of their children and unnecessary suspensions resulted in serious conflict that required intervention by school district representatives.

The educators (focus group #2) had a deep understanding of special education law regarding equitable services and parental involvement. In fact, two of the Black parents sought support from their district's board of education and reported inequitable treatment to outside agencies. Two of the Hispanic mothers shared instances of engaging in intense conversations with school staff and district leaders due to inequitable treatment they were receiving at their child's school. All participants shared that once they had a better understanding of their child's disability, they became stronger advocates and did whatever it took to make sure their children had a quality education and appropriate services to reach their fullest potential.

Discussion of Findings

The research that exists on children with disabilities does not provide a wealth of information on the parental perspective, let alone those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds. Quantitative methodology that is used in studies of children with disabilities does not always yield the results that capture the true experiences of students and their families and … "survey research underscores the need for face-to-face qualitative research methods" (Harry, 2008, p. 375). There were few studies that I found in the literature that used qualitative methods, specifically narrative inquiry, to examine the experiences faced by CLD parents of children with disabilities.

Literature examining the barriers that many CLD parents and their children face as they navigate the special education process is beginning to get more attention. Unfortunately, this has been an ongoing issue that many scholars have been trying to shed light on in an effort to improve outcomes for children of color (Blanchett, 2014; Jung, 2011; Harry & Klingner, 2014). With increasing numbers of CLD students enrolled in U.S. schools, some educators face the challenge of getting to know them and how best to meet their needs (Gaye, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009). The goal of this study was to add to the literature by utilizing narrative inquiry to gain in-depth knowledge about the barriers, challenges, and successes faced by CLD parents while navigating the special education process. Data gathered from this study revealed four major themes which build upon the literature of CLD students with disabilities. A discussion of these key themes in comparison to existing literature follows.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and their parents may face numerous challenges as they navigate the educational process which can greatly impact

academic and social outcomes (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Milner, 2015). Furthermore, CLD youth with disabilities often experience greater isolation and discrimination compared to their non-disabled peers (Ford et al., 2017; Harry & Klingner, 2006). Results from this study imply: (a) educators need to develop cultural competence to improve relationships with CLD students and their parents; (b) educators need to improve engagement and partnership in the special education process; (c) educators and parents need to enhance their knowledge of the special education process, and (d) parents with knowledge of the special education process can better advocate for their children.

Educators Need to Develop Cultural Competence to Improve Relationships with CLD students and their Parents. The marginalization of people of color, specifically children in U.S. schools, has been a long-standing problem that has many scholars concerned about re-segregation (Blanchett, 2014; Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). Participants in this study shared that at some point in their child's education they were made to feel invisible, unwelcome, and manipulated. In many instances, educators reportedly misinterpreted their child's behaviors. This biased approach would have led to a misdiagnosis of many of the children represented in this study if parents had not objected. One participant shared that her child's educator informed her, "You need to go get him an IEP. He's acting like my son–like he's going to have ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder) and ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder)." Rightfully, the parent was upset because the teacher did not have adequate data or the expertise to make assumptions about her child.

Another parent shared that after multiple suspensions the child expressed dislike for the teacher. The child felt "picked on" and was often accused of situations that were

later found to be manipulated by the educator. Harry and Klingner's (2014) case studies of schools with an overrepresentation of minority students in special education revealed similar findings. Several students at the schools they observed had poor relationships with staff. For instance, "negative relationships were evident when a teacher insulted children and their families to their faces or in front of the entire class, and in the angry or defiant expressions on children's faces when that teacher addressed them" (p.53). Unfortunately, Black and Hispanic children are at greater risk compared to their peers for suspension for similar behaviors (Garraway & Robinson, 2017). Furthermore, the misinterpretation of students' behaviors coupled with educator bias causes many Black and Hispanic children to be placed unnecessarily in special education (Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009).

With increasing diversity in classrooms and the unique needs of CLD students with disabilities, some educators are unclear on how to serve them. Under-identification (i.e., refusal of services) and poor service delivery are issues gaining more attention (Metzger et al., 2010; USDE, 2016). Consistent with the literature, some of the CLD parents in this study faced unnecessary barriers in obtaining special education services for their child due to bias, lack of resources, and lack of educator knowledge (Blanchett et al., 2009; Stanley, 2015; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015). Steeley and Lukacs (2015) also found similar issues in their case study of a Hispanic mother's (Ms. G) experience with her child's special education team. Ms. G reported that her son was "marginalized" during both his pre-K and elementary school years. As a result, the family moved to a new school district to obtain a better education. Barriers related to cultural misunderstanding caused Ms. G's son to feel "shut out and unwelcome in the classroom" (p.25).

Findings in Steeley and Lukacs' study were consistent with some of the participant interviews that I conducted. Like Ms. G, many participants in the current study indicated that their child's educator lacked interest in their family's values and identity. Furthermore, some participants in this study expressed similar feelings of distrust when educators were not transparent about their child's progress. The aforementioned behaviors caused the parents to feel uncomfortable and like unequal partners in their child's education. The stories of parents' interactions with school staff have implications for what educators can do to support CLD students and engage their parents. When educators strive to become culturally competent they are more likely to engage and build positive relationships with students and parents (Garraway & Robinson, 2017; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015).

Educators Need to Engage and Partner with CLD Parents. Positive home-school relationships are necessary for students' academic success and social-emotional wellness (Simmons, 2017). Scholars concede that lack of educator engagement of CLD students and their parents often contributes to low parental involvement (Brandon & Brown, 2009; Geenen, et al., 2005; Kim & Morningstar, 2013). Findings from this study confirm that when parents are not included as equal partners in their child's education they may become withdrawn. Hence, relationships with educators are more likely to become strained. This is particularly troubling for CLD students in special education since parental input is necessary to ensure equitable educational opportunities. Therefore, it is imperative that educators prioritize relationship building and engagement of CLD students and their parents. Milner (2015) asserts,

> Although few, if any, would argue against the importance of building and sustaining relationships with students, how many districts and schools across the country have actually developed a movement to focus on them? ... Because teachers and other educators can sometimes unintentionally marginalize parents, other family members, and community members, teachers must be vigilant in their efforts to build partnerships *with* them. (P. 100)

Consistent with Milner's statement, some of the parents in this study shared that their child's educators had not taken the time to engage them and many felt uncomfortable during special education meetings.

Several participants reported that they "liked" their child's teacher or thought they were "nice". However, participants also expressed their frustration at some point in the special education process due to the lack of teacher engagement and partnership. All but one participant reported a lack of communication and follow-up regarding the special education process. This finding confirmed Rossetti et al.'s (2017) notion that educators need to follow up with parents between meetings to establish rapport, analyze their needs, and offer support. Scholars agree that the inability of some teachers to actively engage CLD parents and make them feel like equal educational partners continues to be a serious concern (Francis, Haines, Nagro, 2017; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Jung, 2011). It is necessary for educators to determine best ways to engage and partner with CLD parents so that students can experience greater success. The lack of transparency, communication, and engagement, caused some participants in this study to question educators' knowledge and skills to adequately address their child's needs.

Educators and Parents Need to Enhance their Knowledge of the Special Education Process. As discussed in previous chapters, Black and Hispanic students continue to be identified for special education at higher rates compared to their peers (Blanchett, 2014; Ford, 2012). With greater attention focused on disproportionality, some special education teams may be reluctant to identify students who may qualify and benefit from an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Another reason for educators' hesitancy to qualify students who need services may be their lack of knowledge related to specific disabilities and the IEP process in general (Metzger et al., 2010). "Identification of students based on behavioral deficits, excesses, or patterns depends on the clinical experience and judgment of school personnel; and sometimes professionals disagree (p. 22). Hence, countless numbers of Black and Hispanic students who may qualify for special education services are being denied.

Misinterpretation of special education law and lack of cultural competence can contribute to CLD students being either misidentified, under identified, or over represented in special education (Metzger et al., 2010). When students were referred for special education services, most parents in this study were not provided data regarding interventions used by the teacher to address the issues *prior* to referral. Surprisingly, after IEP services were implemented, parents were not kept abreast of student progress regarding IEP goals unless they inquired, or it was brought up during a parent-teacher conference or annual IEP meeting. These findings confirm Rossetti et al.'s (2017) notion that, "teachers should explicitly explain instructional methods to families and clearly describe how services specifically meet students' needs" (p. 334-335). Metzger, et al. (2010) concedes that teachers are responsible for collecting accurate data and interpreting

it so that parents have a clear understanding of their child's progress. Interestingly, none of the parents in this study mentioned educator's use of pre-referral strategies. The lack of accurate data to document interventions is a serious concern and has implications for how special education teams justify decisions regarding CLD students.

Parent Advocacy. Some of the participants initiated the special education referral, but were met with resistance from their child's school team. At the time of the interviews, several of the parents were still "fighting" with school teams for adequate services for their children. For instance, one of the participants had been waiting several months for a requested meeting to discuss her child's progress and to determine if updates were needed to the IEP. Another parent shared that when she approached the school team about considering an IEP to address her son's social-emotional needs, she felt helpless because there were no responses to her requests. In both cases, the parents submitted a formal letter to their child's school principal and threatened to contact central office administrators for support. This has implications for how educators and school leaders address parental concerns about the special education process.

Participants' stories have implications for how school leaders prioritize professional development. Educators should have knowledge and skills to better explain the special education process and walk parents through in a collaborative manner. Many of the participants questioned whether their child's general and special educators had the knowledge, skills, and resources to effectively meet students' needs.

Most participants learned about their child's disability and resources on their own and did not feel school staff spent enough time trying to educate them. Furthermore, parents learned about out-of-school resources to support their children through

colleagues, service providers, friends, or outside organizations. These findings confirmed previous research by Stanley (2015) on the advocacy efforts of African American mothers of children with disabilities. The mothers in Stanley's study utilized community resources to educate themselves on their child's disability and to become better advocates. Participants in Stanley's study experienced similar barriers as the participants in this study. For instance, participants in both studies shared instances of not being heard; fear of child's mistreatment; and lack of adequate resource, etc. Participants in both studies learned to advocate for their children and persevered until they obtained adequate services.

Study Implications

The ability of educators to respond to language and cultural diversity is critical to meeting the growing challenges that schools face in the 21st century (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). There are limited studies that focus on CLD parental perspectives of children with disabilities, specifically in the primary years. Furthermore, theories focused on family engagement and collaborative partnerships often exclude in-depth information on effectively engaging CLD parents of students with disabilities. The findings from this study provide implications for research, educator practice, and CLD parents of children with disabilities.

Theoretical Implications. Three frameworks informed my approach for this study: (1) The Maryland Family Engagement Framework (2016); (2) Turnbull et al., (2011) Family System's Framework; and (3) Epstein (1995) School, Family, and Community Partnerships. The aforementioned frameworks provided important perspectives on engaging families and other invested stakeholders in the education of

children. Many of the studies on parental engagement reference Epstein's theory of school, family, and community partnerships. Epstein (2009) considers partnerships as overlapping spheres of influence where both educators and parents work together to influence the outcomes of students. The Turnbull, et al. (2011) theory focuses on various microcultures (e.g. race, language, ethnicity, etc.) that influence relationships between schools, students with disabilities, and their families.

As previously stated, there is limited research on educators' engagement of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of children with disabilities. Interestingly, the law requires full parental participation in the special education process, but there were limited studies found that focused on what CLD parents consider effective practices to engagement. Although Epstein's theory emphasizes the importance of providing individualized attention to the unique needs of students and their families, individuals with disabilities are not addressed. Turnbull et al.'s theory provides insight on the necessity of considering family systems when collaborating with families of children with disabilities, but the specific needs of Black and Hispanic families is warranted. Furthermore, the Maryland Family Engagement Framework address the engagement of CLD parents, but is limited in that it targets early childhood educators and preschool aged children. The theory focuses mostly on academic and social skill development for kindergarten readiness. More research is needed on the engagement of Black and Hispanic students with disabilities and their parents at all academic levels (i.e. pre-K-12).

Implications for Educators and Service Providers. According to participants, they preferred a genuine, collaborative effort when it came to educating their children. As discussed, many participants felt like outsiders in their child's education. They believed

that if they were welcomed and treated like equal partners, the special education process could have been improved. Hence, family engagement was necessary in order for their children to experience success. Engagement of Black and Hispanic students with disabilities and their parents has implications for how educators prioritize their time and resources (Rossetti et al., 2017). Furthermore, *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) requires parental participation in the special education process, yet many educators do the bare minimum to include them. In an effort to improve outcomes for Black and Hispanic students with disabilities, it is necessary for their parents to have a voice. In addition, educators must allow CLD parents to have their rightful place as equal partners in their child's education.

Many educators lack thorough understanding of the IEP process from pre-referral through service delivery (Harry & Klinger, 2014; Rossetti et al., 2017). Some educators may have adequate knowledge and skills, but bias may get in the way of a child receiving equitable special education services. When this happens, parents are more likely to feel unwelcome and like unequal partners. One study participant asserted, "So again, just going back to the idea of not making assumptions…being open and not coming across as very authoritarian." Participants in this study indicated that one of the best ways that educators can improve communication with CLD parents is to show respect by watching body language and tone of voice. Educators must be willing to take into consideration parents' perspectives while avoiding power imbalance.

Discussions of inequity in special education due to issues such as social class, race, and educator bias resonated from the interviews. The aforementioned issues have implications for how educational leaders at the district and school level address cultural

competence. It is imperative that educational leaders consider the impact that developing culturally competent school teams have on student and family engagement (Garraway, 2017). Furthermore, improving cultural competence may lead to enhanced relationships with students and their parents. When this occurs, educators and CLD parents of students with disabilities may experience greater success partnering in the special education process. Given the increase of CLD students in special education, educational leaders would be wise to provide educators and service providers' ongoing opportunities for cultural competency training.

Implications for Educational Leaders. Findings from the study imply that continuous professional learning opportunities on cultural competence and family engagement is warranted. Interestingly, some participants shared the need for leaders at the K-12 and higher education level to better train pre-service and in-service educators to improve student and parent engagement. Scholars in the field of special education have shed light on the problem of unprepared educators working with CLD students (Chu & Garcia, 2014; Harry & Klinger, 2014; Blanchett, 2014; Irvine, 2011). Ultimately, it is the role of district and school leaders to ensure that strategic and school improvement plans include goals that cultivate a culture that honors racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity.

The role of educational leaders and their subordinates in engaging students and their families is critical to improving outcomes for students, especially those who have been marginalized by society (Khalifa, 2012). Providing staff with ongoing opportunities for cultural competency training is essential to improved school climate and student success. Furthermore, educational leaders that are committed to equity and social justice must communicate their vision and model expected behaviors.

Scholars stress the importance of educational leaders fostering positive relationships between staff, students, and their families (Epstein, 1995; Turnbull et al., 2011; Stefanski, Valli & Jacobson, 2016). Research shows that parents are often involved in surface level activities such as orientations, conferences, field trips, etc., but true engagement is including them in opportunities to share their voice and make decisions on various matters involving the school (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). For instance, educational leaders might consider inviting parents to participate in school leadership team meetings. These opportunities may be beneficial in improving students' academic and social-emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, CLD parents of students with disabilities may bring a much-needed perspective to the educational environment. Improving educational opportunities for CLD children often determines how educators engage and partner with their parents.

Families are often excluded from full participation in their child's education due to race and power imbalance (Geenen, Power, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2005). This means CLD students with disabilities may miss out on valuable services and are left further behind academically and socially. When educational leaders take time to evaluate school climate and student outcomes through the lens of family engagement, then meaningful change can begin to take place for CLD students with disabilities. Until schools focus on the interests, strengths, and needs of CLD students and their families, there will continue to be opportunity gaps, achievement gaps, and poor outcomes for CLD students (Garraway & Robinson, 2017).

Implications for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Parents. As previously discussed, navigating the special education process was frustrating for all participants of

this study at some point during their journey. This was largely due to their lack of knowledge related to the special education process and feeling like unequal partners. One of the participants in this study emphasized that parents should know and understand everything that will occur during their child's special education meetings. Providing clarity so that parents are well prepared to make important contributions and engage as equal partners is a good first step in improving practice.

In order for parents to be included as full participants in the special education process there will need to be a shift in how special education teams educate and partner with parents. One looming question is how CLD parents are included as full participants if there are no consistent practices in place to ensure they have access and opportunity. Educational leaders need to ensure that educating parents about their child's disability and the individualized education program (IEP) is a priority. Hence, educators should be held more accountable for communicating effectively with parents throughout the process. This critical issue can be best addressed when school district and building administrators re-consider special education policies and practices.

All parents in this study shared that they desired additional support navigating the special education process. Supporting CLD parents as they navigate the process can be addressed in a variety of ways depending on parental knowledge and need. When a parent or educator initiates a screening meeting for special education, a suggestion is for a designee from the team to conduct a pre-meeting with the parent. Many parents reported feeling intimidated when they were faced with a variety of unfamiliar individuals at conferences. A follow-up confirmation call a few days prior to the meeting to share who will be attending, as well as their roles, may help parents who are new to the

process. Furthermore, a detailed outline or agenda to assist parents and others attending the meeting might be useful in organizing content and questions.

One of the participants indicated that she had been waiting to hear from the special education team for three months and was concerned about next steps. Parents and educators on the team are required to be informed of timelines related to the special education process. Parents should be encouraged to join local and statewide organizations to help them connect with other parents and to gain a deeper understanding of their child's disability. Resources made available at schools regarding community networks would be ideal.

Special education teams should evaluate their effectiveness and make sure that roles are clearly defined. In addition to legal timelines, it may be useful for teams to create their own timeline to include scheduled check-ins with parents. For instance, the special education team should be clear on who will contact the parent during each stage of the special education process: pre-referral, identification, and after the Individualized Education Program (IEP) has been written and services begin.

Implications for Policymakers at District, Local, and State Levels. In 2016, the executive director of the Prince George's County Maryland ARC (formerly Association for Retarded Citizens) hosted a town hall meeting to hear the voices of parents of children with disabilities and other invested stakeholders regarding a proposal by state legislators to change the minimum wage. Special education representatives from local, state, and federal organizations were invited to share their perspectives and collaborate with families, service providers, and educators on how to address the critical issue of wage changes for individuals serving adults with disabilities. The minimum

wage change had the potential to disrupt service delivery for individuals with developmental disabilities if their service providers were not adequately paid. Some special education advocates argued that if disability service providers (i.e., aides; disability day program staff, etc.) made the same rate of pay as an individual working at fast food restaurants or other venues, there would be a risk of losing quality providers. The director's efforts to involve parents and communities in reaching out to the county executive and other influential leaders is an example of the needed partnership between families, communities, and organizations to improve outcomes for children with disabilities.

In order to improve outcomes for CLD students with disabilities, all invested stakeholders will need to be given an opportunity to collaborate as well as ensuring that parents are equal partners in decision making when possible. According to scholars focused on family engagement, enhancing parental knowledge about ways to best support their children will take the effort of educators and community partners (Epstein et al., 2009; Turnbull et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is important that educators and policymakers consider the voices of parents before implementing policy and laws that impact children with disabilities. Often, key players are left out of decisions by those who may not have the knowledge or experience to truly implement effective change. When policymakers and lawmakers at the local, state, and national levels include CLD parents of students with disabilities as co-collaborators and advocates, then improved educational opportunities may become a reality.

Future Research

Research suggests that improved home-school relationships, parent engagement, and purposeful collaboration between stakeholders can increase positive outcomes for students (LoCasale-Crouch, et al., 2008; Turnbull, et al., 2011). Yet, the perspective of CLD parents has often been underestimated (Milner, 2015; Pleet and Wandry, 2010). Overall, findings from this study were consistent with previous research on the barriers and challenges faced by parents navigating the special education process.

Suggestions for future research include exploring various perspectives by hearing participants' voices through the use of qualitative methods to collect data (Harry, 2008). Until greater focus is placed on the needs of CLD students and their families, there will continue to be opportunity gaps, achievement gaps, and poor outcomes for CLD students (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015). Family engagement for *all* students is important and there is a great need for future research focusing on the specific engagement needs of Black and Hispanic parents of students with disabilities (Harry, 2008; Jung, 2011; Stanley, 2015; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015).

The figure below (see Figure 5) highlights the gaps found in the literature and recommendations for future research.

Gaps in Literature	Implications	Recommendations for future Research
• Limited literature on CLD students with disabilities and family engagement (Harry, 2008; Rossetti et al., 2017) across grade levels.	• General and special educators need to be more prepared to work with students at all grade levels. More research is needed on transitions/articulation.	• Explore pre-K-12 students' and their parents' relationships with school staff. • Explore CLD parental engagement at the middle and high school level.
• Limited studies focus on equalizing educational partnerships with CLD parents (Maryland Family Engagement Framework, 2017; Geenen, et al., 2005).	• Families are often excluded due to issues of power imbalance (Geenen, Power, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2005). • Implications for individuals serving children's mental, physical, and educational needs (NASW, 2016).	• Explore educators' and service providers' family engagement practices. • Explore IEP teams' facilitation of IEP meetings with a diverse group of parents (cross case analysis).
• Limited studies focus on CLD parental perspectives of children with disabilities, specifically in the primary years (Maryland Family Engagement Framework, 2017).	• Implications for individuals serving children's academic, mental, physical, and educational needs (NASW, 2016).	• Explore practices of community organizations that partner with schools to engage CLD students with disabilities and their families.
Lack of studies on enhancing parental knowledge of IEP process (Rossetti et al., 2016)	• Implications for early childhood, elementary and secondary special education teams • Services provided by community organizations and agencies servicing individuals with disabilities	• Explore the practices of special education staff in preparing parents for the special education process. • Explore general education teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in teaching students with IEPs in inclusive settings.

Figure 5: Recommendations for future research.

In addition to utilizing qualitative methods to explore the needs of CLD students with disabilities and their parents, future research should consider a mixed methods approach to data collection. A mixed methods approach may allow the researcher to obtain a larger participant pool. Furthermore, considering the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods may provide meaningful information that cannot be obtained from using one primary research method.

Study Limitations

The primary limitations of this study include the small sample size and educational settings. Thirteen parents of children with disabilities were selected to participate in the study (combination of individual interviewees and focus group participants). Six of the parents participated in two individual narrative interviews. Two focus group interviews were conducted. A purposive sample of Black and Hispanic parents participated in study.

The sample population was limited to parents or primary caregivers of children with disabilities that attended early learning centers, non-public/special schools for students with disabilities, and parents who are members of a parent organization (i.e., Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Permission from public schools that serve parents of children with disabilities were not sought for this study. The decision not to include public schools that may serve larger populations as opposed to smaller educational organizations may be a limitation in terms of the number of interested participants. Future studies should include students with disabilities to gain their perspective.

Conclusion

There is a growing body of research and literature focused on race, language, and disability. Many scholars have conducted impressive research that targets key issues and provides suggestions for teachers, educational leaders, and policymakers to address equity in special education (Artiles, et al., 2016; Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Blanchett, 2014; Harry & Klingner, 2014). However, few studies shed light on perspectives of CLD parents. This poses a problem because the very individuals that educators should be trying to support deserve a voice.

Unfortunately, racial bias is an issue that policymakers and educational leaders have not adequately addressed or have outright ignored. In order to create a school climate that respects and honors diversity, educators from the district level down to the classroom will need to continuously strives to become culturally competent (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Gaye, 2010). This will require transparency about biases and prejudice as well as a commitment to ensure that the unique needs of CLD students are met (Ladson- Billings, 2009; Gaye, 2010). Including parents as partners in the educational process can enlighten educators on how best to identify and address their needs.

Engaging parents and including them as partners in the educational process has implications for how district and school level administrators manage resources and communicate priorities to all stakeholders. Developing culturally competent staff can impact family engagement as well as the social-emotional wellbeing of CLD students. When educational leaders take time to evaluate school climate and student outcomes through the lenses of family engagement and cultural responsiveness, then meaningful change can begin to take place for CLD students with disabilities. As previously

discussed, it will take intentional effort and allocated time to invest in these students and their parents. With greater input and the support of *all* stakeholders, students with disabilities are more likely to experience positive outcomes. Doing this can inform the practice of educators, provide perspectives on the needs of these families, and inevitably improve outcomes for CLD youth with disabilities.

Practitioner Lens

According to Kim (2016), the researcher's organization of participants' information, as well as the researcher's prior knowledge and personal experience, helps the researcher make sense of the data and may "guide the storyteller's judgment…" (p. 157). My intensive educational preparation in psychology, social work, human resource development, and school-based administration, proved to be beneficial in data collection, analysis, and collaborative story telling. Furthermore, the narration phase and conversation phases of the individual interviews conducted in this study align closely with the work I have done with clients as a psychotherapist.

The aforementioned professional preparation allowed for successful transitions during narrative interviews by: 1) listening attentively, 2) asking occasional relevant questions to probe and clarify, 3) allowing for flexibility, and 4) being open-minded (Kim, 2016). "Along with these careful advance preparations, knowing how to ask good interview questions is paramount in generating meaningful narrative data" (Kim, 2016, p. 170). According to Adams (2016), narrative inquiry has the benefit of a therapeutic process for participants and the researcher's analysis of their stories can serve as a vehicle to inform others and impact change.

I reflect on the contributions of the seasoned scholars that have paved the way for me to contribute to this much needed body of research. I am reminded of the true state of special education and the fact that there is often greater consideration and respect for those with money, knowledge, and the right skin color. These individuals often get what they want for their children while Black and Hispanic children may be left with inadequate service and less than desirable opportunities. In my work as a special educator, social worker, and school-based administrator, I have seen first-hand how special education teams make decisions about students based on educator bias.

As an advocate for families of children with disabilities, I aim to educate and empower them so they can self-advocate. The completion of the research conducted with the participants is just the beginning of the work that I am called to do. The dissertation journey may end, but now that I have been privileged to hear their voices, the real work must begin. I am driven to continue conducting research, sharing the voices of the unheard, and enlightening others who are willing to collaborate and stand with me to impact change.

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Appendices

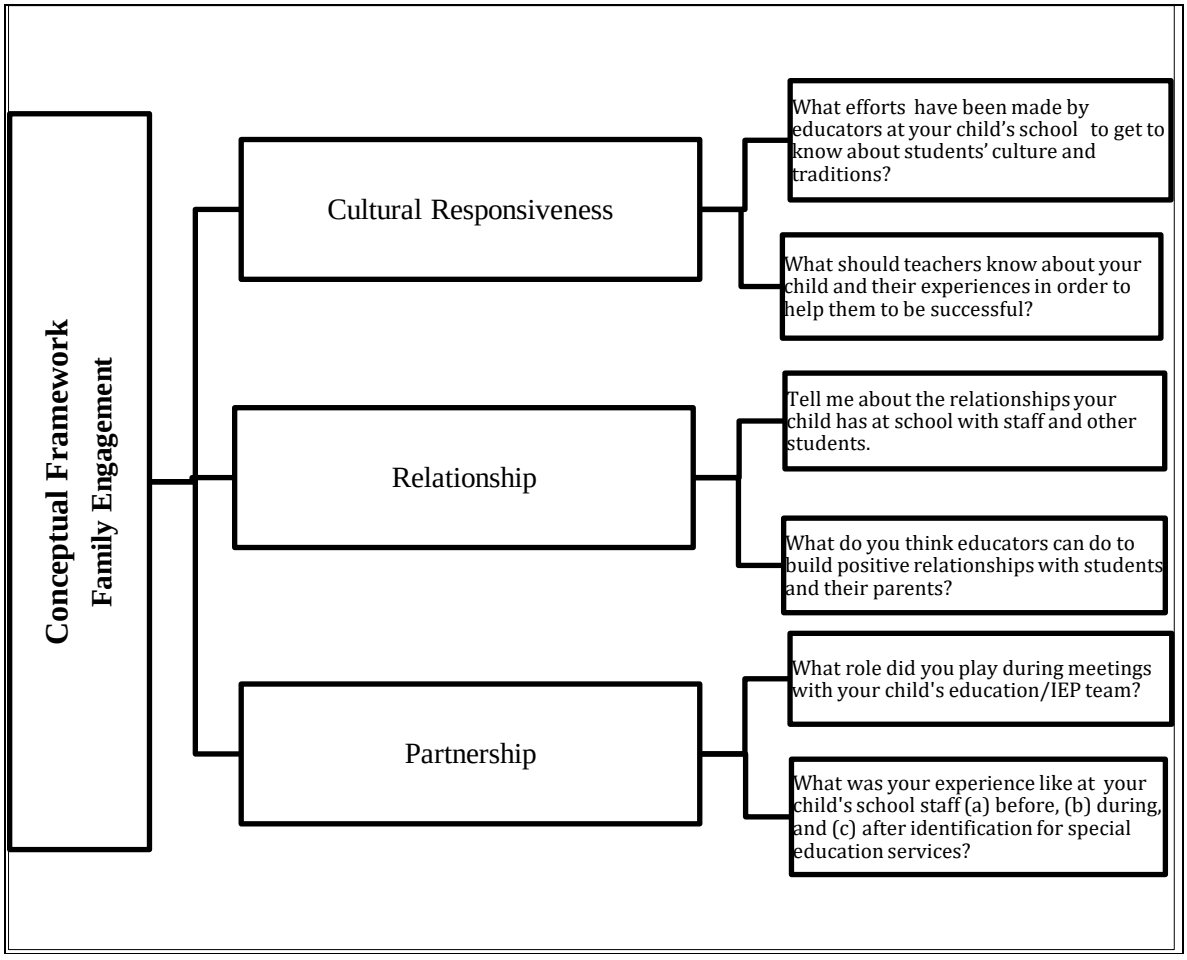
Appendix A: Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

Overarching Question:

What do the narratives of parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities tell about the child and parental experience with educators during the primary school years?

Sub-questions

1. What do these parents' stories reveal about student and family engagement practices at their child's school?
2. What can educators learn from parents of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities in order to improve cultural responsiveness?



Appendix B: Site Participation Letter

Renee L. Garraway
[redacted]

Date

Greetings_____:

I am a doctoral candidate at Bowie State University and the recipient of the Culturally Responsive Educational Leaders in Special Education (CRELSE) Grant, which is funded by the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). My research interest is on the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of pre-kindergarten through third-grade students receiving special education services.

I have over 25 years of diverse work experience in clinical social work, special education, and school-based administration. Working with culturally and linguistically diverse pre-school through high school students across the socioeconomic spectrum has afforded me opportunities to learn about various populations of students and to support staff to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs. I believe that my teaching, social work, and leadership experiences have provided fuel for my purpose and I continuously seek opportunities to learn and develop professionally.

Improving outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse youth with disabilities takes the effort of all invested stakeholders. I would like to speak with you to further discuss my research interest and how we might collaborate. I have enclosed a flyer with additional information on the study. I would appreciate it if you would recommend parents that you feel meet the criteria and would be a good fit for this study. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or feedback. I can be reached at 301-922-8659 or via email at GARRAWAYR0107@students.bowiestate.edu.

All the best,

Renee L. Garraway

Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Flyer

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

Renee Garraway is a doctoral candidate at Bowie State University and the recipient of the Culturally Responsive Educational Leaders in Special Education (CRELSE) Grant, which is funded by the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Her research interest is on the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students receiving special education services.

Problem

The most important member of the educational team is the parent, but often, their voices go unheard. Parents know their children best and should be valued partners in decisions involving their child's academics and social-emotional wellbeing. Ms. Garraway is conducting a research study on the perspectives of culturally diverse parents of pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students receiving special education services or in-process of identification.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities on the child and parental experience with educators during the preschool and elementary grades (pre-K through fifth grade).

Participants

4. Parents are sought to participate in a small focus group (3-6 parents). Focus groups last approximately 60 minutes.
5. Parents can choose to participate in an individual interview (in-person or phone) instead of participation in the focus group. Interviews last approximately 45-60 minutes.
6. Participant's child must have been identified, in-process, or placed at-risk of identification in special education during grades pre-K – fifth.
7. Participants should have a child with a diagnosed disability or placed at-risk for identification (i.e., in the referral process, school improvement team (S.I.T), educational management team (E.M.T.), screening, etc.) and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Additional Information

8. Parents will receive a **$15 Target gift card** for their participation in the study.

If you are interested in participating in this valuable study or have additional questions, please contact Renee Garraway at **240-583-0107**, or by email at reneelgarraway@gmail.com. Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title: *Narratives of the Special Education Experience in Preschool and Elementary: Unheard Voices of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Parents of Children with Disabilities*

Investigator:

Name: Renee L. Garraway Dept: Educational Leadership Phone: 301-922-8659

Introduction

You are being asked to participate in a research study focused on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents of children with disabilities during the preschool and elementary years (pre-kindergarten through fifth grade).

You were selected as a possible participant because you have a child with a disability or placed at-risk for identification. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions that you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents of children with disabilities about their experiences with educators during the preschool and elementary years (pre-kindergarten through fifth grade). The goal of this study is to elucidate the challenges, barriers, and successes faced by these students and their parents.

Description of the Study Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things:

1. Participate in interviews and/or a focus group
2. Document your ideas and thoughts through the use of a journal
3. Complete a short demographic questionnaire

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study

There are no reasonable foreseeable (or expected) risks.

Benefits of Being in the Study

The benefits of participation are:

1. Focusing on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with disabilities in the primary grades will inevitably provide an understanding of how their school experiences impact their trajectory.
2. A critical issue that needs to be addressed is how schools support, engage and partner with CLD students with disabilities and their parents so that these students have opportunities that allow them to meet their fullest potential.

Confidentiality

This study is anonymous. I will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity. The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. If audio or video tape recordings are made, only the researcher and transcriber will have access to them. I will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you. You will receive the following payment/reimbursement: $15 gift card.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at *any time* without affecting your relationship with the investigator of this study. Your decision will not result in any loss or benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the interviewer not use any of your interview material.

Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Renee Garraway at reneelgarraway@gmail.com or by telephone at (301) 922-8659. If you like, a summary of the results of the study will be sent to you. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator, you may contact Dr. Cosmos U. Nwokeafor (cnwokeafor@bowiestate.edu), Chair, Institutional Review Board Office, (301) 860-3406.
If you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you can report them to Dr. Cosmos U. Nwokeafor at the number above.

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Subject's name (print) _____

Subject's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

What	When	Time	Where
Individual Interviews (6-8 participants)	November 2018-January 2019	45-60 minutes	• School private office • Coffee shop • Home • Phone (individual) • Skype or Google Chat
Focus Group Interview (Two groups 3-6 participants each)	November 2018-December 2019	60-75 minutes	• School conference • Private office

Steps to be conducted prior to interview:

- Letter of agreement/permission from appropriate leadership at three sites (i.e., center director, CEO, PTA president).
- Share flyer with participants
- Cite contact/coordinator to make initial contact with participants
- Phone conference with each participant to answer questions about study
- Obtain signed consent from participants
- Email demographic questionnaire to participants
- Schedule individual interviews and focus groups
- Provide Spanish copy of interview questions to interpreter (if necessary)
- Review consent form and confirm permission to audio record

Materials:

Audio recorder

Pen

Notebook

Participant consent forms

Demographic questionnaire

Translated questions for Spanish speaking participants and interpreter

Journal prompts

Water for participants

Greeting/Introduction

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in this study. As we previously discussed, I am working on my doctoral degree in educational leadership with an emphasis on special education and cultural responsiveness. I am particularly interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse parents and their children as they navigate the special education process during the primary years of education. The voices of culturally and linguistically diverse parents, specifically Black and Hispanic parents, are under- represented in the literature on special education.

A critical issue that needs to be addressed is how schools support, engage and partner with students with disabilities and their parents so that these students have opportunities that allow them to meet their fullest potential. I appreciate you taking time out of your schedules to be here and for allowing me to hear your story. I would like to review again the participant agreement form that was previously sent to you and answer any questions that you may have. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and the information you share will be kept confidential. Your identity will not be shared in any subsequent publication. If you agree,

this interview will be recorded in order to get an accurate transcription of our conversation. Do you have any questions before we begin?

The interview method that will be used is considered narrative. It is similar to having an informal conversation. You will notice that I may not ask lots of questions and most of our time together will allow you an opportunity to share your story with few prompts.

Interview Questions

(Interviews #1 and #2)

- What efforts have been made by educators at your child's school to get to know about students' culture and traditions?
- What should teachers know about your child and their experiences in order to help them to be successful?
- Tell me about the relationships your child has at school with staff and other students.
- What do you think educators can do to build positive relationships with students and their parents?
- What role did you play during meetings with your child's education/IEP team?
- What was your experience like with your child's school staff (a) before, (b) during, and (c) after identification for special education services?

Interview #3 Questions

(Focus Groups)

- *What advice would you give a parent on how to partner with educators at their child's school to ensure their child's needs are met?*
- *What would you say to educators about what they can do to learn about their students' culture and traditions?*

- *If you were on an interview panel to select your child's teacher, what are one to two questions you would like to ask them?*
- *What do you think a parent of a child with a disability might need to know to help prepare them for meeting with the school's special education team?*
- *What do you think would make a new student and their parents feel welcome at your child's school?*
- *If you can remember any positive experiences working with your child's school, please share what happened and how you felt.*

Closing

Thank you again for participating in this study. If it is ok with you, I would like to follow-up again to have another interview (wait for response). In the meantime, please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any additional questions or feedback. I have hard copies of the journal prompts and will be happy to send them electronically if that works better. The journal prompts are not mandatory for participation in the study. Please feel free to use them to share thoughts about anything you did not share during our time or to expound on what you have shared. The prompts are another data source to allow me to develop a deeper understanding of your experience. There are three prompts that you may select from. My contact information is on the participant agreement form or you can also feel free to email me.

Appendix F: Journal

Journal Prompts

I have signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the research study entitled *Narratives of the Special Education Experience in Preschool and Elementary: Unheard Voices of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Parents of Children with Disabilities.* I understand that my participation in the writing activity is voluntary and that I can choose not to respond to the prompts. I understand that I will not be identified by name in any research or publications resulting from this study.

Please select one or more of the journal reflections below. The journal prompts are a guide, so feel free to create your own journal entry/reflection activity. The journal activity will provide participants an opportunity to: (1) share something not discussed during our interview/focus group or (2) expound on thoughts regarding experiences as a parent navigating through the special education process. Feel free to use pseudonyms. Please contact Renee Garraway via phone (240) 583-0107 or email (reneelgarraway@gmail.com) if you have questions.

Option 1: Write a letter to a parent of a child who will be attending their first meeting with their child's educational team (e.g., special education team, educational management team (E.M.T), school instructional team (S.I.T.). What would you say to them as they prepare for the meeting?

Option 2: Write a letter to your child's education team (e.g., special education team, educational management team (E.M.T), school instructional team (S.I.T.). about your experiences before, during, and after your child's qualification for special education services.

Option 3: Create a **word splash** (collection of terms or concepts related to the topic placed randomly around the topic heading) describing your feelings and thoughts related to your experience as you navigate(d) the special education process. After creating the word splash, write 4-6 sentences that summarize your thoughts.

Printed Name:

_____

Signature:

_____

Appendix G: Researcher Reflection Log

Sample Reflection Log

Date	Participant Name	Contact Phone, Person, Email, Video	Follow-Up Date
11/15/18	Chelsea	Phone	12/30/18

Key Words/Phrases

1. Advocated for services. Keeps emailing principal.
2. Long Waiting. No Response from school.
3. Preparation for middle school. Need Services. Falling Behind
4. Seeking resources. Needs help understanding law.
5. Speech needs. ADHD- takes Medication.
6. Good relationship with speech pathologist.

Notes

Chelsea is unable to participate in focus groups, but will participate in second interview and complete journal entry. Chelsea will schedule a meeting with school principal for 1/3/19 and will provide an update regarding the meeting.

Researcher Reflection

Chelsea was very inspiring. She is still learning her options regarding her child's disability and will not stop until she gets what she deserves. Chelsea is a true advocate for her child. As a parent, I realize that I need to stand firm when I don't have peace about a situation involving my kids. It can be intimidating as a parent when sitting in meetings with lots of people who seem to be on the same team, yet you feel like the outsider. As a parent of a child with a disability I realize I can do a better job of speaking up. As a Black woman there have been times that I waited until after the meeting or did my own research because I didn't want the team to think I was clueless. I did not want to be seen like some of the parents that I have heard some of my co-workers talk negatively about. This interview made me realize areas I need to work on as a parent and as an educator.

Appendix H: External Qualitative Research Consultation

External Research Consultation

Scholar	Field/Expertise	Affiliation	Contact Type
Dr. Alfredo Artiles	**Special Education**	Arizona State	Person, Phone
Dr. Ann Bennett	**Qualitative Inquiry**	Kennesaw State University	AERA Qualitative Research SIG Mentor
Dr. Ron Chenail	**Qualitative Inquiry**	Nova Southeastern University	Personal;The Qualitative Review Conference
Dr. Douglas Cheney	**Special Education**	Council for Exceptional Children	Email, Phone
Dr. Cheryl J. Craig	**Narrative Inquiry**	Texas A& M	Doctoral Seminar
Dr. Julius Davis	**Qualitative Research & Black Male**	Bowie State University	Mentor
Dr. Joyce Epstein	**School, Family and Community Partnerships**	Johns Hopkins University	Email and Conference
Dr. Donna Y. Ford	**Cultural Competence, Gifted Black students**	Vanderbilt University	Person R.A.C.E. Mentoring Conference
Dr. Melissa Freeman	**Qualitative Inquiry**	University of Georgia	AERA Qualitative Research SIG Mentor
Dr. Geneva Gaye	**Cultural Responsiveness**	University of Washington	Person
Dr. Gail Joseph	**Early Childhood and Family Studies**	University of Washington	Phone
Dr. Jeong-Hee Kim	**Narrative Research**	Texas Tech University	Person and Email
Dr. Lynn Butler-Kisber	**Qualitative Inquiry**	McGill University	Person
Dr. Eli Lieber	**Research Data Analysis and Management**	*Co-founder/CEO of Dedoose*	Person
Dr. Johnny Saldana	**Qualitative Data Analysis**	Arizona State University	Person and Workshops
Dr. Jillian Whatley	**Implicit Bias**	Georgia State University	Mentor
Dr. Arthur Williams	**Educational Leadership; Social Justice**	Loyola Maryland University, adjunct	Mentor
Dr. Brian L. Wright	**Early Childhood**	University of Memphis	Person and Phone

Appendix I: IRB Approval

Prepare for Life

Graduate School Office
Center for Business and Graduate Studies

MEMORANDUM
Application Approval Notification

TO:	Ms. Renee L. Garraway
FROM:	Cosmas U. Nwokeafor, Ph.D. Chair, IRB Bowie State University Bowie, MD 20715
RE:	**IRB Number 004-018** **Project Title "Narratives of the Special Education Experience in Preschool and Elementary: Unheard Voices of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Parents of Children with Disabilities"**
Approval Date:	November 6, 2018
Expiration Date:	November 6, 2019
Type of Application	New Project
Type of Research:	Nonexempt
Type of Review For Application	Expedited

The Bowie State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved your IRB Proposal application in accordance with 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects and the Bowie State University's IRB guidelines and procedures. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with the Board regarding your research.

Appendix J: Code List

CODE LIST

Code	Definition
Cultural Competence	• Identifying and addressing biases. • Getting to know students and their families. • Understanding students' likes, strengths, needs. • Cultural Reciprocity
Engagement and Partnership	• Involving parents in school/class events and decisions. • Parent is valued team member. • Preparation for IEP team meeting. • Transparency about child's needs and IEP process.
Educator Knowledge	• Understanding children's strengths and needs. • Understanding and articulating the IEP process to parents. • Access and use of quality resources
Parent Knowledge	• Understanding children's needs. • Understanding the IEP process. Quality resources/ adequate services.

Appendix K: Coding Chart

Sample of Coding Charts

The researcher quantified the responses based on the codes that emerged during the first coding cycle and then went back to transcripts to determine the key responses that fit in each category.

Research Sub-Question #1: What do these parents' stories reveal about student and family engagement practices at their child's school?

Sample Structural Code (Saldana, 2015): Improve educator, parent, and student interactions/engagement

Coded Items	**Number of Participants**
Transparency	12
Partnership	13
Relationship	11
Communication	13

Research Sub-Question #2: What can educators learn from culturally and linguistically diverse parents of students with disabilities in order to improve cultural responsiveness?

Sample Structural Code (Saldana, 2015): Build Positive Relationships

Coded Items	**Number of Participants**
Know students	13
Respectful Communication	12
Cultural Competence	11
Communication	13

Coding methods: Descriptive coding and InVivo coding were used in order to extract themes from the data. In Vivo coding is appropriate for beginning researchers and honoring participants' voice (Saldana, 2015).

Sample InVivo Coding Chart

Participant	**Summary**	**Primary Codes**
Hannah	*I was sitting there and didn't say anything. They could see on my face I was not happy. Nobody said anything. I was confused and scared".- Hannah*	Parent Engagement
Jeslyn	*I knew something was wrong with him. It was not okay being delayed because we live in a bilingual household.*	Know Students
Carla	*I believe it has a lot to do culturally what you bring to the table and sometimes those teachers are trying to make the kids fit in to what they understand and what their lived experiences are versus you know what's right before them.*	Cultural Competence
Joanna	*The relationship she (teacher) has with him and how he responds to that compared to before; she really acts like - no she's not acting- she really cares - not acting- she cares*	Relationship

Appendix L: Participant Demographic Questionnaire

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

I have signed a consent form agreeing to participate in the research study entitled *Narratives of the Special Education Experience in Preschool and Elementary: Unheard Voices of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Parents of Children with Disabilities.*

I understand that my responses to this questionnaire are voluntary and that I can choose not to answer certain questions. I understand that I will not be identified by name in any research or publications resulting from this study.

1. **Printed Name** _____
2. **Signature** _____
3. **Best Contact Number** _____
4. **Email** _____
5. **List all adults and children living in the home.** Please include ages and relationship to the child with the disability (i.e., mother, sister, brother, grandmother, etc.).

Name	Age	Title (e.g. mother, sister, etc.)

6. **Nationality/Ethnicity**

Country of Birth of child with disability _____

Country of Birth of mother of child _____

Country of Birth of father of child _____

7. Parent Description

a. Black
b. African
c. African American
d. White
e. Asian
f. American Indian or Alaska Native
g. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
h. Latino
i. Hispanic
j. Other _____

8. How would you define the race/ethnicity of your **child with the disability**?

Child's Description

a. Black
b. African
c. African American
d. White
e. Asian
f. American Indian or Alaska Native
g. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
h. Latino
i. Hispanic
j. Other _____

9. **Languages Spoken in Home**

Primary (first) _____

Other _____

10. What disability has your child(ren) been diagnosed with (e.g., learning (LD), behavior (EBD)? _____

11. What grade (i.e., pre-K, first, etc.) is your child in (child diagnosed with a disability)?

_____

12. What is the highest level of education completed by the parents/primary caretaker(s) in the home?

Father's education	Mother's education
a. High school	a. High school
b. Trade School/Certificate School/Certificate	b. Trade
c. Associates Degree	c. Associates Degree
d. Bachelor's Degree	d. Bachelor's Degree
e. Master's Degree	e. Master's Degree
f. Doctorate Degree	f. Doctorate Degree
g. Other _____ _____	g. Other

13. Father's Occupation _____

14. Mother's Occupation _____

Appendix M: English/Spanish Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions (English and Spanish)

English Version

- What advice would you give a parent on how to partner with educators at their child's school to ensure their child's needs are met?
- What would you say to educators about what they can do to learn about their students' culture and traditions?
- If you were on an interview panel to select your child's teacher, what are one to two questions you would like to ask them?
- What do you think a parent of a child with a disability might need to know to help prepare them for meeting with the school's special education team?
- What do you think would make a new student and their parents feel welcome at your child's school?
- If you can remember any positive experiences working with your child's school, please share what happened and how you felt.

Spanish Version

- ¿Qué consejo le darías a los padres sobre cómo asociarse con los maestros en la escuela de sus hijos para garantizar que se satisfagan las necesidades de sus hijos?
- ¿Qué le diría a los maestros sobre lo que pueden hacer para aprender sobre la cultura y las tradiciones de sus estudiantes?
- Si estuvo en un panel de entrevistas para seleccionar al maestro de su hijo, ¿cuáles son una o dos preguntas que le gustaría hacerle?
- ¿Qué crees que un padre de un niño con discapacidad podría necesitar saber para ayudar a prepararlos para la reunión con el equipo de educación especial de la escuela?
- ¿Qué crees que haría que un nuevo alumno y sus padres se sientan bienvenidos en la escuela de tu hijo?
- Si puede recordar alguna experiencia positiva trabajando con la escuela de su hijo, por favor comparta lo que sucedió y cómo se sintió.

Appendix N: Site Letter

Site Agreement Letter

Renee Garraway, Doctoral Candidate
Educational Leadership
[redacted]
GARRAWAYR0107@students.bowiestate.edu

November 15, 2018

[redacted]

Greetings Ms. [redacted]

As you know, I am a recipient of the Culturally Responsive Educational Leaders in Special Education (CRELSE) Grant, which is funded by the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). My research interest is on the perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse families of students receiving special education services.

I appreciate your willingness to connect me with interested parents of children with disabilities that your organization services or supports. As discussed, each participant is required to sign consent to participate in the confidential study. All names and locations are kept in confidence to protect the identity of participants as well as the organization. I have received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to conduct the study. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or concerns.

All the best,

Renee Garraway
Doctoral Candidate

Your signature below indicates I have been granted permission to contact parents to conduct research during the 2018-19 school year as a graduate student through Bowie State University. Participation in this study is voluntary and parents are required to fill out a consent form if interested.

Director or Designee Signature_____