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Julius Davis

*Bowie State University*

Lynne Long

*Bowie State University*

Sarah Green

*Bowie State University*

Yvonne M. Crawford

*Bowie State University*

Jeannette Blackwood

*Bowie State University*  
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# An In-Depth Case Study of a Prospective Black Male Teacher Candidate with an Undisclosed Disability at a Historically Black College and University

## **About the Author(s)**

Julius Davis, Lynne Long, Sarah Green, and Yvonne Crawford, Department of Teaching, Learning and Professional Development at Bowie State University.

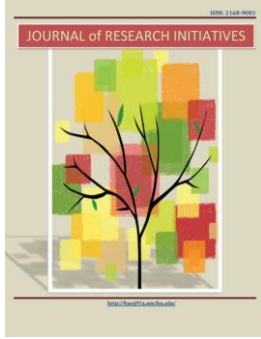
Jeannette Blackwood, Department of Educational Studies and Leadership at Bowie State University.

## **Keywords**

Black males, special education, higher education, teacher education

## **Cover Page Footnote**

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## **AN IN-DEPTH CASE STUDY OF A PROSPECTIVE BLACK MALE TEACHER CANDIDATE WITH AN UNDISCLOSED DISABILITY AT A HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY**

**Julius Davis**, Bowie State University  
**Lynne Long**, Bowie State University  
**Sarah Green**, Bowie State University  
**Yvonne Crawford**, Bowie State University  
**Jeannette Blackwood**, Bowie State University

### **Abstract**

As scholarship of Black male collegians is growing, there is limited research attentive to Black males with disabilities and in teacher education programs. The research focused on pre-service Black male teachers with disabilities attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and the federal laws impacting their education and supports is absent. This research study fills the void by examining the individual experiences of a Black male pre-service teacher with a disability attending an HBCU. The research team used Black males with disability theory and single-subject case study methodology to describe Christopher "CJ" Jackson's journey navigating his program of study as an English education major. Four main themes emerged in the study of CJ that capture his collegiate and teacher education experiences: a) influences to become an English teacher, b) field experience issues, c) inconsistent academic performance, and d) postsecondary academic adjustments. The research team offers recommendations for supporting pre-service Black male teachers in college and teacher education programs.

*Keywords:* Black males, special education, higher education, teacher education

### **Introduction**

Over the last ten years, the increased focus on researching Black males attending institutions of higher education has not translated to significantly more attention being paid to young men with disabilities or in teacher education programs (Harper, Smith, & Davis, 2016; Strayhorn, 2016; Wood, 2014). Researchers have reported that Black males represent 5.43% of the postsecondary education enrollment in the United States (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014). Of the Black men who attend college, roughly 33% are enrolled in four-year colleges and universities (Palmer et al., 2014), while 41% attend two-year colleges (Palmer et al., 2014). The preponderance of qualitative and quantitative research available focuses on Black men attending public and private four-year colleges and universities at predominantly white and historically Black colleges and universities (Goings, 2016; Jett, 2013; Strayhorn, 2014), but most of the research focused on Black men in higher education have practically ignored and overlooked those with disabilities and in teacher education programs.

A limited body of qualitative research has more recently begun to investigate the postsecondary educational experiences of Black males with disabilities at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs; Banks, 2014). Research exists which states the importance of these institutions in diversifying higher education in the United States, "HBCUs serve as a critical institutional type that provides a large level of access to postsecondary education for Black men" (Palmer et al., 2014, p. 1901). However, of the 101, 644 Black men enrolled at

HBCUs, it is not evident how many have disabilities or are enrolled in teacher education programs.

In the research literature, the discussions of Black males' academic preparation, persistence, and graduation rates in higher education institutions often do not include many discussions about disabilities. Researchers have reported that Black males are less prepared for the academic rigors of college and once in college, they "take fewer notes in class, spend less time writing papers and completing class assignments, participate less frequently in campus activities, hold fewer leadership positions, and report lower grades." (Harper, 2012, p. 4). Moreover, researchers contend Black males have lower graduation rates (32.7%) than any other group and are two-thirds more likely not to finish college (Palmer et al., 2014). However, much is still unknown about Black males with disabilities in higher education, despite research about students with disabilities in higher education reporting their lower rates of persistence and attainment of degrees compared to students without disabilities (Horn & Berkold, 1999). Currently, very little is known specifically for the persistence and degree attainment of Black males with disabilities.

The limited data about the enrollment, academic preparation, course performance, and campus experience at different institutions (i.e., HBCUs) enjoyed by Black males with disabilities is due (in part) to these students not being legally required to disclose their disability in higher education unless they want to receive designated services and accommodations. Also, most of the available research on Black males has not specifically described how their findings apply to the young men with disabilities and in teacher education programs across higher education institutions.

This article examines the research literature on Black males with disabilities in higher education institutions and teacher education programs to better understand their experiences in these academic spaces. In addition, a conceptual framework called Black males with disabilities theory (BMDT) is presented to not only understand the experiences of Black male collegians with disabilities but also to explore how to support these students. Moreover, the research team describes the case study methods used to research a Black male student as well as faculty and staff members' experiences trying to support the student. Next, the research team shares the findings of Christopher "CJ" Jackson's (pseudonym) academic performance and adjustments made to support him in a teacher education program. Finally, the research team discusses research findings and offers solutions to support Black male students with disabilities in institutions of higher education.

### **Brief Review of the Literature**

The literature review is divided into two important parts. First, the research team discusses the literature on Black males with disabilities in higher education. Next, the research team shares a review of the literature on pre-service Black male teachers in teacher preparation programs.

#### **Black Males with Disabilities in Higher Education**

There is a small body of research focused on Black male students with disabilities in higher education (Banks & Hughes, 2013; Robinson, 2015a). Banks and Robinson are two of the leading scholars on Black males with disabilities in higher education. Robinson's work focuses on Black males with dyslexia and twice exceptional students and Black males with learning disabilities who are also identified as gifted. Banks' research focuses on African American males with learning disabilities, hearing impairment, cerebral palsy, and anxiety disorders at HBCUs. This body of scholarship has provided insight into how Black males with disabilities transition to college, supports and barriers faced in college by Black males with disabilities, and how Black

males with disabilities deal with negative stereotypes associated with their disability.

Research conducted by Banks has provided insight into the experiences of African American males with disabilities in higher education. In a study of the postsecondary transition of three African American male students with disabilities, Banks (2014) presented three major findings: (a) deficit ideologies undermined self-determination, (b) the importance of adequate information before transitioning, and (c) refusal to access support services. Her study results show that transition planning from high school to college and disability support services are important for African American male collegians with disabilities. Additionally, Banks and Gibson (2016) provided insight into 12 African American males' transition to college and reported four broad themes: (a) family influence, (b) faculty support, (c) campus belongingness, and (d) culturally responsive disability services. These researchers highlight the importance of family, faculty, and disability services in supporting African American males with disabilities in higher education. In the Banks and Hughes (2013) study of 12 African American males with disabilities, three key findings were reported: (a) awareness of dominant narratives surrounding the intersection of disability, race/ethnicity, and gender, (b) acts of resistance against disability labels; and (c) the impact of community and support services at an HBCU. The findings from this study demonstrate how African American males with disabilities resist deficit perspectives and negative labels associated them.

Robinson's extensive work on Black males with disabilities in higher education has significantly expanded the research literature on the subject while calling for more scholarly research (Robinson, 2013; Robinson, 2015b; Robinson, Ford, Ellis & Hartlep, 2016). Emanating from his dissertation, Robinson's (2015a) research used autoethnography to chronicle his experiences with dyslexia and being a gifted education student. In his research, four primary themes emerged: (a) being the "other" (Robinson, 2016), (b) undiagnosed dyslexia, (c) critical consciousness development, and (d) giftedness as a strength. Robinson also advanced a provocative triple identity development theory for working with gifted Black males with dyslexia (Robinson, 2016). To help learn from his experiences and bring awareness to Black males with dyslexia who are gifted, Robinson (2017) has pushed the boundaries of research in this subject by publishing works in several venues for a variety of audiences.

### **The Status of Black Male Teachers**

According to Toldson and Snitman (2010), primary and secondary school teachers were often the first and fifth occupational choices for college-educated Black males. However, little is known about Black male students with disabilities aspirations to become teachers. Studies of Black male students with disabilities in college who are preparing to become teachers are practically nonexistent. In fact, discussions about Black male teachers with disabilities becoming teachers are rarely ever discussed despite calls for more Black male teachers. Scott (2016) called for increased focus on the preparation, recruitment, and retention of Black male special education teachers; however, his call to action does not focus on Black males with disabilities in higher education institutions or teacher preparation programs. In general, there is a lack of research focused on prospective Black male teachers (Goings & Bianco, 2016; Pabon, Anderson, & Kharem, 2011; Yates, Pelphrey, & Smith, 2008).

There is a small body of research focused on pre-service Black male teachers at the high school and collegiate levels. Goings and Bianco (2016) explored the perspectives of 22 Black male teachers in 11th and 12th grade participating in a high school teacher preparation program about the factors that influenced or deterred them from becoming teachers. Three themes emerged from their study of pre-service Black male teachers, which revolved around: (a)

teacher's low expectations for them, (b) weighing the pros and cons of entering the teaching profession, and (c) the lack of influence of teachers of color on their decision to become teachers.

Pabon et al. (2011) reported reflections of practice from the Urban Community Teachers Project; an initiative focused on recruiting and preparing Black male teachers to teach in urban schools. The project had 21 prospective Black male undergraduate and graduate teacher education candidates. The project was intended to reframe curriculum, pedagogical practices, and transform communities. They found "Black male teacher candidates need additional support in navigating college, academics, personal matters, and work responsibilities" (Pabon et al., 2011, p. 365).

Yates et al. (2008) conducted a phenomenological study of eight African American male pre-service teachers at a historically Black university in the south. The study reported protective factors of African American pre-service teachers that consisted of families, communities, school, and individual. Thus, in their analysis, pre-service African American male teachers were influenced by their parents and siblings that contributed to their success, personal drive to succeed, and their religious and spiritual beliefs played a role in their success. Additionally, having high expectations, building personal relationships with peers, and being in an environment of care played a critical role in the success Black male pre-service teachers experienced in this study.

In sum, research on Black male collegians with disabilities in higher education and teacher education programs suggests that it is still in its infancy stages. There is a need for more research of this population with specific disabilities throughout the Pre-K-12 system, and those transitioning into higher education institutions. Moreover, there is a need for research on Black males with disabilities in teacher education programs at HBCUs, and this study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by examining the experiences of a prospective Black male teacher with an undisclosed disability.

### **Federal Laws for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education**

There is limited research on how federal laws intended to protect students with disabilities in higher education impact faculty members' ability to support them. Two primary federal laws protect students with disabilities from discrimination in colleges and universities: Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (amended in 2008) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504). The ADA legally ensures equal opportunity for people with disabilities in private and public-sector services and employment including colleges and universities. It also ensures that students with disabilities are provided the right to same privileges, programs, services, goods, facilities, and advantages in the most inclusive setting that addresses their needs. Title II of the ADA specifically prohibits all state and local government entities such as public colleges and universities from discriminating against students with a disability.

Section 504 ensures that any program receiving direct or indirect financial assistance including financial aid from the federal government is prohibited from discriminating against a person because of his or her disability. Excluding qualified students with a disability from any course, the program of study, other components of the education program or activities because of his or her disability is prohibited under section 504. The act of counseling a qualified student with a disability toward more restrictive majors or careers than other students is prohibited under Section 504. The ADA would also characterize these acts as discriminatory and take action to protect the rights of students with disabilities.

A student with a disability entering a college or university does not have to inform the

higher education institution about their disability. However, to receive academic accommodations, students with disabilities must identify themselves as having a disability and provide the appropriate documentation. Recognizing that colleges and universities may have their disability documentation requirements for students to secure accommodations, individuals with disabilities must provide relevant personnel at these institutions with current documentation of a disability from the medical professional(s) that also describe their limitations and abilities. The appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities are based on the student's needs and disability, and higher education institutions may be required to change policies, practices, and procedures to accommodate students with disabilities. The accommodations can include modifications to the academic requirements such as extra time on exams, course substitutions for required or prerequisite courses, no penalties for certain errors on papers or exams to ensure equal educational opportunity.

In short, there are a limited number of research studies available that describe how federal laws impact faculty and staff's ability to support Black males with disabilities in postsecondary institutions. This research study seeks to fill a needed research gap by providing insight into faculty and staff members understanding of federal laws and how it impacts their approach to working with and supporting a pre-service Black male teacher with an undisclosed disability. This study also provides insights into specific accommodations provided to a Black collegian with a disability who desires to become an English teacher.

### **Black Males with Disability Theory**

In this study, the research team used African American male theory (AAMT) and disability studies theory (DST) to create Black Males with Disability Theory (BMDT) to examine the lived experiences of a Black male with a disability who is working towards earning his bachelor's degree in English education. The research team used this theoretical perspective to ground the examination of a Black male collegian with a disability in a culturally grounded and sensitive theoretical framework (Tilman, 2002; Robinson, 2016). The combination of these theoretical approaches has not been used to study prospective Black male undergraduate students with a disability in higher education institutions or teacher education programs.

AAMT is a theoretical framework developed to provide a unifying theory to explain the lives of African American boys and men (Bush & Bush, 2013). Bush and Bush (2013) offer theoretical tenets that explain African American boys and men lives:

1. The individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena, and trajectory of African American boys and men's lives are best analyzed using an ecological systems approach;
2. There is something unique about being male and of African descent;
3. There are a continuity and continuation of African culture, consciousness, and biology that influence the experiences of African American boys and men;
4. African American boys and men are resilient and resistant;
5. Race and racism coupled with classism and sexism have a profound impact on every aspect of the lives of African American boys and men; and
6. The focus and purpose of study and programs concerning African American boys and men should be the pursuit of social justice (Bush & Bush, 2013, pp. 7-12).

For this study, the research team used three components (1, 2, and 4) from AAMT to theorize and discuss the experiences of a prospective Black male teacher with a disability in a teacher education program at an HBCU.

### **AAMT Component One**

The first component of AAMT examined the individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena, and trajectory of a prospective Black male teacher with a disability in a teacher education program at an HBCU. Bush and Bush (2013) use Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to take into consideration the "interconnected environmental systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem" (p. 8) of the pre-service Black male teacher in the study. The microsystem focuses on the pre-service Black male teacher personality, beliefs, perceptions, interactions with family, extended family, peers, teachers, school, community, and other environments.

The microsystem is divided into inner and outer categories where the inner categories are personality, beliefs, perceptions. The outer categories focus on the influence of family, extended family, peers, teachers, community, and other environments. The mesosystem connects the "links between the environments of the microsystem" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 8) and includes the outer category of the microsystem. The exosystem pertains to the external environments and community factors that affect a pre-service Black male teacher with a disability in a teacher education program at an HBCU. The macrosystem examines larger systems and culture that may affect a prospective Black male teacher with a disability individual development in a teacher education program at an HBCU. The chronosystem considers "the pattern and arrangement of the environmental events and transitions and the sociohistorical context in which they occur over time" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 8). All of these environmental systems are interconnected.

### **AAMT Component Two**

The second component of AAMT indicates that the "there is something unique about being male and of African descent" (p. 10). There is something unique about being a Black male with a disability who is in college, in a teacher education program, and pursuing a degree to become an English teacher. This tenet seeks to understand the distinctive attributes of Black males as a group as well as individual distinctions within the group. This component seeks to understand the individual distinctions of a Black male collegian with disability studying to become an English teacher.

### **AAMT Component Four**

The fourth component of AAMT "addresses the ability, capacity, and powers... or systems... to rise above adversity" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 10-11) for a pre-service Black male teacher with a disability. The use of AAMT "is particularly interested in discovering and illuminating the resiliency [of a pre-service Black male teacher] present in the inner microsystem..., outer microsystem..., and mesosystem" (Bush & Bush, 2013, p. 11). The resiliency of this teacher can be seen in how he deals with obstacles and navigates instructors, courses, teacher preparation programs, college, commuting to and from school.

### **Disability Studies Theory**

In the field of disability studies, divisions exist between scholars and practitioners about the social and medical models of disabilities based on the notion of impairment (medical) and disability (social construct). Banks and Hughes (2013) posit, "disability theory rejects traditional notions of the medical model of disability that focuses on individual deficits and impairments" (p. 371). Disability studies scholars recognize that "impairments" are a natural part of human variation that does not mean that an individual is deficient or needs to be "fixed." The extant and recent scholarship recognizes the intersectionality of race, gender, class, disability, and the impact on Black male students across the PK-12 pipeline and in higher education spaces (Banks & Hughes, 2013; Robinson, 2015a). Banks and Hughes (2013) argue that theorists of disability



studies recognize that “meanings attached to disability, [are] socially constructed” (p. 371) and institutional, structural, and systematic barriers contribute to the preponderance of disability, especially for Black males. The research team fully embrace the tradition of disability studies to genuinely “understand the experience of individuals with disabilities” (Banks & Hughes, 2013, p. 371).

### **Black Male with Disability Theory Summary**

By combining AAMT and DST, the research team thinks these two theories provide a framework to discuss and examine Black males with disabilities unique experiences. These theories also provide the theoretical basis to form BMDT, a culturally grounded lens to examine race, gender, class, and disability. Black male is intentionally used in BMDT to expand thinking beyond just African American males, but Black males who are not African American that is impacted by the socially constructed nature of disabilities in America and across the globe (Gillborn, 2015). BMDT also operates from the premise that there is something unique about being a Black male that transcends geographical location. The tenets of BMDT focuses on the individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena, and trajectory of Black males from an ecological systems theory perspective. BMDT also focuses on illuminating the resilience of Black males and rejects medical models and deficit views of disability. This theory recognizes that “impairments” are a natural part of human variation. In this study, BMDT is used to describe the individual experiences of a Black male with a disability using an ecological systems theory perspective to shed light on his resilience in earning his degree.

### **Methodology**

A single-subject case study research methodology guided the research team’s approach to this study. A case study is a detailed examination of a single subject (Yin, 2013) that can include a situational analysis where a “particular event... is studied from the points of view of all the participants” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.60). The research team used a case study to report about CJ and their experiences trying to support him without knowing specifics about his disability and being challenged by federal laws to support individuals with disabilities in higher education. “Case studies are most often used when a researcher seeks to understand a phenomenon for which there is no in-depth understanding at that point in time” (Hays & Singh, 2011, p.340). The team sought to provide in-depth accounts of CJ’s educational experiences and efforts to support him that is aligned with case study methodologies.

### **Participant**

CJ is a 21-year-old Black male with an undisclosed disability in his fourth year of college as an English Education major. CJ’s immediate family includes his mother, brother, and grandmother. He did not have a relationship with his father, but his mother encouraged him to do so. CJ’s mother is a single parent who works for a government office and she relies heavily on CJ’s grandmother for support with her two sons. Based on conversations and interactions with CJ, his mother, and grandmother, the research team suspects CJ’s brother may also have a disability. CJ’s mother is very involved in his education, has a Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) on file, and is very active in his schooling. CJ has attended two HBCUs over the last four years. He attended Urban University (UU; pseudonym) for two years and decided to leave the university because of problems with the university’s teacher education program. He transferred to Leadership University (LU; pseudonym) two years ago to continue his studies as an English Education major. Even though CJ has been in college for four years, he is not a senior. Based on his university file, he is a sophomore. CJ is a part of a larger internal grant-funded research project of pre-and in-service Black male teachers attending a historically

Black university that has been approved by the university's Internal Review Board.

### **The Research Team**

The research team worked on this case for the last nine months and continues to work with CJ and his mother. The research team is comprised of the course instructor (Dr. Haki Asante), director of field experiences (Dr. Mia Ray), field experience supervisor (Mrs. Nia Greg), special education faculty (Dr. Yolanda Smith) and doctoral student (Mrs. Tamika Heart). The names are all pseudonyms. The course instructor, director, and supervisor had regular contact with CJ. The special education faculty member and doctoral student were added to the team provide expertise on students with disabilities and the laws surrounding them. The research team met regularly to discuss CJ, as well as examine their beliefs, thoughts, and perspectives of CJ and his disability. Based on the team's interactions, they became key informants to provide crucial information about CJ that also helped to triangulate data and knowledge of the situation. The research team sought to ensure proper supports were in place to: improve his experience, better understand the supports needed for him to be successful; and help CJ to be an advocate for himself. The team also committed to support, work with, and help him to graduate from the university, and be successful in the profession.

### **Case Study Rationale**

Conducting case study research requires researchers to establish a rationale, and three major issues are facing the research team in supporting CJ that guided the investigation (Creswell, 2013). First, the federal disability laws do not require CJ to disclose his disability to faculty and staff working with him. The research team characterized CJ's disability as undisclosed because he did not disclose it to his course instructor, faculty, and staff in the field experience office. However, CJ registered his disability with the university office of disability services. Dr. Robert Grey (pseudonym) is the director of the disability office, and it is designed to support students with disabilities by helping them utilize academic resources, navigate campus life, and ensure that faculty receive notification of and provide needed accommodations. Students have the choice to use the services offered by the disability office, but services are not provided without a student request.

Second, the research team did not know exactly what disability CJ had but thought he might have autism based on their limited knowledge, observations, and assessment. They suspected that CJ had a disability based on his behavior, quality of assignments, speech, body language, handwriting, interactions with the course instructor, director and coordinator of field experiences and peers in class. The team recognized they were not qualified to diagnose his disability but began to research autism and teachers with autism to better understand the disability and teachers' experiences with the disability. Ultimately, the research team was trying to better understand the disability and academic support needed. Lastly, the team recognized that there were probably many faculty and staff who were unprepared to support students with disabilities at the higher education level.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In case study research, multiple sources of data are used, and the research team used informal interviews, meeting notes, field notes, memos, academic transcripts, documents, participant observations, direct observations, and course assignments. The research team used CJ's "Why I want to be a teacher?" essay, autobiography, cultural heritage paper, and teaching philosophy paper as data sources. This data corpus provides a rich dataset to examine CJ's experiences and the experiences of faculty and staff members trying to support him without knowledge of his specific disability. The research team read through all the data multiple times

to get a general sense of the data and to begin the process of identifying themes. The approach to data analysis took on an iterative narrative process (Creswell, 2013). The process helped to describe CJ's experiences, his collegiate academic performance, challenges. The iterative process also helped to describe how faculty and staff attempted to support him in the teacher education program, field experiences and becoming an English teacher. Using a categorical aggregation data analysis approach to identify themes or patterns (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2011), the research team examined the data for critical incidents, concerns, and issues to create the themes.

### **Results**

Four main themes describe CJ's journey to navigate his program of study as an English education major. The themes that emerged from the research team were: a) influences to become an English teacher, b) field experience issues, c) inconsistent academic performance, and d) postsecondary academic adjustments. The first theme, influences to become an English teacher, describes what swayed CJ to be an English education major. The second theme, field experience issues, describe CJ's challenges and experiences trying to apply and secure a field experience and the research team concerns with placing him in a school. The third theme, inconsistent academic performance, describes CJ's experiences pursuing his degree in English education. The last theme, postsecondary academic adjustments, describes the collaborative meeting, concerns about CJ's academic performance, the accommodations and adjustments made to support him.

#### **Theme 1: Influences to Become an English Teacher**

In his "Why I want to be a teacher?" essay, CJ wrote that his surroundings played a major role in influencing his decision to become a teacher. One of the reasons CJ wanted to be an English teacher is that he likes reading and writing and views himself as a good writer. He wrote:

For as long as I can remember English has been a major factor in my life. I live and breathe for moments where I get to sit down and read literature; I spend countless hours writing stories. Posting them online for the enjoyment of others like me (Autobiography).

CJ has an affinity towards reading and writing that lead him to want to become an English teacher, and his mother is an advocate for him and his dreams of becoming an English teacher. He noted that his family members and high school experiences including being on the honor roll and having a good relationship with his teachers influenced him to become a teacher. CJ came from a family of teachers and listed them in his autobiography:

My grandmother, my great aunt, my great uncle, my mom, and aunt. All of them were teachers. I wouldn't say I felt pressured by them into choosing the career.

An English teacher in high school also played a major role in influencing CJ's decision to become a teacher, and she continues to support him along the way. She has also played a significant role in him developing positive perceptions of his writing abilities and she has served as mentor teacher during his field experiences at UU.

#### **Theme 2: Field Experience Issues**

In Introduction to Education with Dr. Haki Asante, CJ had a field experience requirement. While CJ completed the initial field experience application, there were other documents he had to complete and submit to the field experience office such as getting a background check. CJ commuted two hours each way to and from school. Given CJ was a student who commuted and used public transportation (e.g., bus), he had to find a time that his mother could take him to get his background check. He obtained his background check and the required documentation, but experienced problems getting it to Mrs. Greg in the field experience office. The field experience office contacted CJ about the documents, but he did not provide

everything that was needed. The office also contacted Asante to inform him that CJ had not completed all the requirements for the field experience.

One day after class, Asante met with CJ to go over all the documents he needed to submit to the field experience office and review the documents that needed to be notarized and provide information about where he could go on campus to get the documents notarized. Asante even walked him to the building to show CJ where to locate the notary. CJ eventually completed all the paperwork, but he was way behind schedule. As CJ was working through the process of completing the necessary paperwork to do his field experience, Asante, Ray, and Greg worked through concerns about placing and having him work with students and teachers because the research team did not know enough about him or the behaviors they were observing and characterizing as a disability. The research team was concerned about how CJ would respond to students given observations and experiences of how he interacted with Asante, Ray, Greg, and peers. In her field notes and conversation with the team, Ray noted how she felt afraid and uncomfortable during one of her encounters with CJ. She wrote:

I was on the phone and beckoned him [CJ] to wait outside my office. He stood outside my office where I could see him. He paced by my door and then started running a fingernail up and down the border which is in front of my door. As he ran his fingers across the board, he messed up parts of the bulletin board. He appeared anxious and irritated because I was on the phone and did not devote my attention to him. At that time, I felt uncomfortable and uneasy.

This is an example of one of the situations that the research team was concerned about how CJ would respond to challenging student behaviors. They were also concerned about the negative repercussions to CJ, students, and the university if something went wrong because he was not provided the proper supports.

To support CJ and provide him with field experiences, Asante took him and the rest of the class on four learning walks at different schools. Unknown to Asante, Ray provided CJ with pointers on what he should do during the learning walks, which enhanced his performance. She told CJ to “look at bulletin boards in the classroom, check to see the assignments that students were engaged in and talk to students about the assignment” (Ray Fieldnotes). Asante noted that CJ did a great job following Ray’s recommendations. He also did a great job interacting with students and teachers in the school.

Also, unknown to Asante and colleagues, CJ performed well in a field experience at his previous university with his supportive high school English teacher. For Asante’s class, CJ contacted his former English teacher to conduct his field experience requirement for the course and she agreed, but he had to get the approval of the principal. CJ contacted the principal to get his approval to conduct his field experience at the school. However, the school had a new principal who was not familiar with the practice of pre-service teachers contacting the school for field experience opportunities. The principal reported the situation to the central office, which resulted in the university partnership office contacting LU to inform Dr. Ray students should not contact schools for placements. It also resulted in CJ not being placed at the school. CJ completed the Introduction to Education course without completing a field experience on his own and earned a grade of B in the course.

### **Theme 3: Inconsistent Academic Performance**

Concerned about CJ’s academic trajectory, Asante conducted a detailed transcript analysis of CJ’s academic performance since he has been in college. He found considerable variation in CJ’s overall academic performance as well as his English and education courses. His

end of the semester cumulative grade point average ranged from 1.0 to 2.7 during his four semesters and one summer session at UU. His transcripts have illustrated that CJ has received two grades of F, one grade of D, four grades of C, eight grades of B, two grades of A and withdrew from four courses at UU during his tenure. He earned 43 of the 71 credit hours he attempted at UU. In 2015, when CJ left UU to transfer to LU, he had a 2.5 overall cumulative grade point average. During his tenure at LU, CJ's end of the semester cumulative grade point average ranged from 1.3 to 3.0 during his four semesters at LU. His transcripts have illustrated that CJ has received three grades of D, three grades of C, six grades of B, one grade of A and withdrew from one course at LU. His current cumulative grade point average at LU is 2.37.

While the research team examined CJ's overall academic performance, they primarily focused on his grades in English and education courses at both LU and UU. Overall, CJ mainly earned B's and C's in his English courses and had one grade of D. Table 1 describes CJ's grades in his English courses.

**Table 1: CJ's English Courses and Grades**

#	University	Semester	Courses	Grade	Year in College
1	UU	Fall 13	ENGL 101 Expository Writing	C	1
2	UU	Spring 14	ENGL 102 Argument and Research	B	1
3	UU	Fall 14	ENGL 208 Critical Writing	C	2
4	UU	Spring 15	ENGL 210 Literary Genres	B	2
5	LU	Fall 15	ENGL 211 Literature of the World	C	2
6	LU	Spring 16	ENGL 302 English Literature II	C	2
7	LU	Spring 16	ENGL 210 Introduction to English Grammar	D	2
8	LU	Fall 16	ENGL 236 Introduction to Literature	B	3
9	LU	Spring 17	ENGL 325 African American Literature II	C	4
10	LU	Spring 17	ENGL 408 Shakespeare and Film/New Media	B	4

CJ has received varying levels of feedback about his writing from K-12 teachers, college professors, and his mother. Many of CJ's high school teachers and college professors gave him positive feedback about his writing and vice versa. He had also gotten feedback from many of his teachers and college professors that his writing is good. His mother also provided insight into his writing. CJ's mother said that she has seen the spectrum of his writing but feels that he typically puts a lot of thought into his writing. Asante's evaluation of CJ's writing concurs with his mother's assessment of his writing. The quality of CJ's writing assignments submitted towards the end of the class was of better quality than the writing assignments that he submitted at the beginning of the semester. CJ passed the university's English proficiency exam the first time he took it before taking Asante's class.

At this point, in CJ's collegiate academic career, he has taken five education courses at UU and LU. He took two education courses at UU and three courses at LU. Table 2 describes the education courses that CJ has taken and his grades in the courses.

**Table 2: CJ's Educations Courses and Grades**

#	University	Semester	Courses	Grade	Year in College
1	UU	Fall 15	EDUC 203 Fundamentals of Teaching with Audio Visual Technology	B	2
2	UU	Fall 15	EDUC 408 Measurement and Evaluation	B	2
3	LU	Spring 16	EDUC 101 Introduction of Education	W	2
4	LU	Fall 16	EDUC 101 Introduction of Education	B	3
5	LU	Spring 17	EDUC 201 Human Growth & Development	B	4
6	LU	Spring 17	EDUC 220 Test Criterion for Certification	Pass	4

An analysis of CJ's English and Education courses reveals that he has oscillated back and forth between grades of C and B in English and maintained a B average in education courses. He has also completed three education courses with field experience requirements.

#### **Theme 4: Postsecondary Academic Adjustments**

The team thought it was important to meet with CJ and his mother to discuss concerns, requirements, standards, and expectations for CJ to complete his program of study, graduate and become certified. The team also thought it was necessary to present a case for CJ and his mother to possibly consider another major based on his academic performance in English and other courses. Asante setup the meeting with CJ's mom and the team thought that it was important not to overwhelm them with a lot of people at the meeting. Therefore, Asante and Ray were thought to be the best persons to represent the team and attend the meeting. There were five attendees at the meeting: CJ, Asante, Ray, CJ's mom and the director of disability services. CJ's mom was unable to attend the meeting in-person, so she attended via phone. CJ's mom recommended that the director of disability services attend the meeting because she felt like he was an advocate and support for him.

Asante and Ray led the meeting and they started the meeting by letting everyone know that the focus was on supporting CJ in graduating and addressing concerns about him and his academic performance. There were three (3) major concerns/discussion points raised during the meeting about CJ's: 1) academic performance/ Praxis I and II exams/academic supports, 2) personal hygiene and appearance, and 3) field experiences/yearlong internship. These concerns were discussed along with supports and strategies to help address them yielding an individualized education plan for CJ to support him in graduating from college. Table 3 summarizes the discussion points, concerns, supports, and strategies that comprise CJ's academic adjustments required by law for individuals with disabilities in college.

**Table 3: Summary of Discussion Points, Concerns, and Supports/Strategies**

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**#1 Discussion Points: Advisement/Academic Performance/Praxis I and II Exams/Academic Supports****Concerns:**

- CJ's academic performance in English, mathematics and other subjects raise concerns about his content knowledge, academic progress, and his ability to pass certain Praxis I and II exams.
- A full course analysis of the university, institutional, English, and education department requirements have been conducted to determine that CJ has about 2-3 years of coursework before he is able to complete his degree.
  - There is a possibility that it may take longer because CJ may have to repeat courses where he has received a D or F.
  - This timeframe will also be contingent upon CJ's progress with Praxis I and II exams. There are some courses and elements of the program that CJ cannot participate in until he has passed Praxis I. He will also need to pass Praxis II: English Content and Pedagogy exams before he can graduate and become certified.

**Supports/Strategies:**

- Continue to take 12 credits per semester to build on 3.0 GPA semester.
- Consult English department and education advisor about courses.
- Dr. Grey suggested that CJ apply for the TRIO program to receive academic supports. Dr. Grey got CJ an application for the TRIO program before the meeting ended.
- Dr. Asante suggested that CJ take advantage of the Writing Lab to help improve his writing and understanding of his content area of English.
- Dr. Grey suggested that CJ take advantage of the tutoring services of Ali a mathematics tutor that he used in the past. CJ indicated that Ali is a good tutor.
- Dr. Ray suggested that CJ use the Shabazz tutoring services on campus.
- Dr. Asante suggested CJ reserve a study room in the library. Upon further discussion, Dr. Grey and CJ talked about the rooms and areas on campus that he has available to do his school work and study.
- Take the EDUC 220: Test Criterion for Certification Course during the Spring 2017 semester to help prepare for Praxis I exam.
- Take the EDUC 491: Preparing for the Math Praxis offered by the mathematics department to help with passing Praxis I Mathematics.
- Use the Praxis Study materials login and password received to prepare for all Praxis I exams.
- Apply for the needed accommodations to take the Praxis exams. The paperwork takes time to complete and get approved. Dr. Grey will sign the paperwork once CJ provides it to him.

**#2 Discussion Points: Personal Hygiene and Appearance****Concerns:**

- CJ has a bad body odor, poor hygiene, unkempt appearance and does not dress professionally during field experience activities.

**Supports/Strategies:**

- CJ was educated about professional attire during the Office of Field Experience orientation. Dr. Ray and Ms. Greg conducted the presentation to EDUC 101: Introduction to Education course and sent an email communication about professional attire.
- CJ was informed about the professional clothes program to learn more about professional attire and get professional clothing. CJ's mother noted that he has professional attire but does not wear the clothing.
- CJ pledged to do a better job of wearing professional attire, being presentable and maintaining his appearance and hygiene.

**#3 Discussion Points: Field Experience/Student Teaching****Concerns:**

- CJ being able to work with students, teachers, families, other stakeholders and function on his own during
-

field experiences and student teaching.

- Finding a field experience and student teaching site(s) to support CJ.
- CJ being able to complete the demanding student teaching requirements.
- CJ improving his appearance and personal hygiene for field experiences and student teaching.

#### **Supports/Strategies:**

- Create an accommodation plan to support CJ during student teaching.
    - One accommodation now might be extra time to work on lesson plans.
  - Find the right school, PDS coordinator, mentor teacher, principal and environment to support CJ during student teaching and field experiences.
  - Provided CJ and his mom with an overview of the student teaching internship requirements that include: student teaching interview, e-portfolio, action research, lesson planning and edTPA. These are very demanding assignments CJ will have to successfully complete to graduate to teach English.
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The collaborative meeting was successful and shed some light on CJ and his mother's thinking, experiences, and reasons behind the academic challenges CJ was experiencing. Based on the meeting, many of CJ's academic challenges and thinking can be traced back to problems with two roommates; trying to avoid telling or letting course instructors, and peers know about his disability; negative perceptions of having a disability and how others will respond to him; trying to advise himself because he did not want his advisor to know about his disability. CJ had problems with two roommates that disturbed him from studying and getting his work done in his room. CJ also did not want anybody to know that he had a disability and he did not want to use his accommodations or ask his instructors for help in his courses. He thinks that having a disability is a negative thing and does not want anyone to know that he has one.

The director of disability services and Dr. Ray challenged CJ's thinking and perception of viewing his disability from a deficit lens. They emphasized the need for CJ to use all the resources LU had to offer including the ones from disability services office to help him be successful and graduate. It was highly recommended that CJ utilize his accommodations to be successful in his classes and to contact the disabilities director if accommodations are not being met so that he can properly intervene. They also emphasized that using accommodations should not be viewed as a deficit, but a support structure to help CJ be successful. Throughout his academic career, CJ took many courses out of sequence because he advised himself without consulting an advisor. CJ's program of study is not aligned with his current academic classification and standing because of his course-taking patterns which have caused problems with scheduling courses for him to take. He must fulfill the requirements of courses he bypassed before moving forward. Additionally, he is at the point where he needs to pass Praxis I to take certain English and education courses and move forward in his program.

#### **Discussion**

In case study research, it is important for researchers to share "lessons learned" and this discussion will primarily focus on those lessons (Creswell, 2013). As the research team reflected on its examination of CJ's reasons for wanting to be an English teacher as well as his inconsistent academic performance, concerns with him completing a field experience, and developing postsecondary academic adjustments, they found a critical need for a culturally sensitive theoretical framework like BMDT. The research team extends Banks and Hughes (2013) and Robinson (2016) work of theory building to challenge deficit views of Black males with disabilities in higher education and expand thinking about Black male teacher candidates with a disability. BMDT provided us with a lens to rethink views of disabilities, impairment, and individual difference. This theoretical perspective helped us to critically examine why the



research team thought CJ's disability could potentially lead him to negatively impact students or prevent him from being a good a teacher. The different collaborative and research meetings and discussions provided a space for the research team to examine their perspectives of CJ and his disability. Not knowing CJ's specific disability or having limited knowledge of him to ground observations, concerns, and his low academic performance contributed to the team adopting deficit views of CJ and what the research team perceives to be his disability.

Not only did the research team have negative views of CJ's disability, but CJ also possessed negative views of his disability and operated in such a way that suggested that something was wrong him. He intentionally did not seek help or accommodations in class or with advisement to cover up his disability. CJ's actions are aligned with Banks (2014) and Banks & Hughes (2013) findings of how Black male students resisted disability labels and how deficit ideologies related to disabilities undermined their self-determination and how they refused services because of conflicting identities. Given the socially constructed nature of disabilities and impairment and the negative societal and educational views of disabilities, the research team and CJ were negatively impacted by these dominant societal views of disability as an impairment and not a natural part of differences between people. Learning more about CJ and his experiences during the collaborative meeting helped to challenge the research team and rethink beliefs. The findings suggest that having collaborative meetings at the university level may be a good way to support Black male students with disabilities, connect with their families, and learn more about them.

Family members played a significant role in supporting CJ's decision to become an English teacher, transition to college and transfer to another university, as well as support him in college. The results from this research confirm and extend Banks and Gibson (2016) and Yates et al. (2008) findings of the influence of family members, faculty support, disability support services advocates, and how they serve as resources and protective factors for Black males with a disability and pre-service Black male teachers. The results of this study suggest family influence, faculty supports, disability services advocates and protective factors are crucial supports for a pre-service Black male teacher candidate with a disability. Supports are also important for a pre-service Black male teacher with a disability to transfer from one university to another. Banks' (2014) research reported findings of inadequate transition planning for Black males with disabilities from high school to college, but little consideration has been given to the need for transition planning for Black males with disabilities who transfer from one university to another as CJ did. There is a need for universities to provide transition plans for Black males transferring from one university to another.

Related to transition planning is the need for proper advisement of Black male students with disabilities once they are at the university. Very little consideration has been given to the need for Black male students with disabilities to be properly advised. CJ's experiences demonstrate the need for Black male students with disabilities to receive proper advisement. He is 2-3 years behind academically, which also comes with additional financial responsibilities. CJ's experiences support insight gained from Pabon et al. (2008) research that states, "Black male teacher candidates need additional support in navigating college, academics, personal matters, and work responsibilities" (p. 365). CJ's case also demonstrates that a Black male teacher candidate with a disability need support to navigate college, academics, and personal matters. For example, CJ lost his on-campus housing and had to commute four hours to and from school. This personal matter required additional support, but he did not seek assistance from disability support services, faculty or advisor. Based on the research available (Banks & Hughes,

2003; Pabon et al., 2008, Robinson, 2015a), support structures are needed to support Black males of varying abilities not just those with a disability, which further highlights the natural variation of individual abilities.

The federal laws intended to support and protect students with disabilities in college constrained CJ's course instructors and advisor in providing him with the proper supports to be successful in classes, his program of study and (ultimately) the profession. The laws do not require CJ to disclose his disability to anyone at the university unless he wants to receive services or accommodations. While the research team understands the law was intended to protect students with a disability from discrimination, it also interferes with students receiving the proper supports and interventions to be successful in classes and programs of study. CJ elected to register his disability with the office of disability services on campus, which is one step in the process and he refrained from telling some course instructors and his academic advisors that he had a disability. Instead, the law left it up to him to determine to whom he disclosed his disability and what services he would utilize. Students with disabilities from other backgrounds also refrain from disclosing their disability on college campuses (Cox, Thompson, Anderson, Mintz, Locks, Morgan, Edelstein, & Wolz, 2017; Grimes, Scevak, Southgate, & Buchanan, 2017; MacLeod, Allan, Lewis, & Robertson, 2017). The research team recommends all students with disabilities in college should be required to disclose them to ensure they receive the proper supports and accommodations to be successful and graduate from college in a reasonable amount of time. The research team also recommends all faculty and staff receive regular training about how to support students with disabilities in college. Currently, some faculty members receive some special education training and others have never had any preparation to work with students who receive special education services.

### **Conclusion**

When the team started exploring this case, they did not know what disability CJ had and possessed constantly changing mixed views as new information about his disability, abilities, and performance became available. The research team questioned his abilities to complete the program field experience and internship requirements, work with students, fulfill Praxis program and certification requirements, and become a teacher. Most of the concerns stemmed from the fact that the research team did not know what disability CJ had, or whether the disability was so severe he could harm students. While the research team never really got an answer to whether CJ's disability could lead him to cause students harm, his behavior during learning walks, as well as performance in education courses and field experience lead the research team to be at ease.

The research team later learned that CJ had autism, but was never educated about the specifics of his disability, which still left a few unanswered questions. Through further research and inquiry, the research team learned there were other teachers with autism and other disabilities who were being successful in teacher education programs, the profession and with students. This case also opened the teams' eyes to other students in the program with disabilities that had not been previously considered because the students did not initially disclose their disability to course instructors. A review of CJ's education course grades, observations of his behavior during learning walks, and reports about his field experience made the entire team reevaluate thoughts and beliefs. CJ had a B average in his education courses and achieved one of the highest reading scores on the Praxis I exam the first time he took it. The research team thinks that CJ has the potential to be a great English teacher with the proper supports in place!

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