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A DisCrit Narrative Case Study: How are the Cards Stacked in Alternative School for African American Students with Disabilities?

By

Cherry M. Stanard

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Education

Special Education

In the

Bagwell College of Education

Kennesaw State University

Dr. Joya Carter Hicks, Chair

Kennesaw, GA

May 2016

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation, first, and foremost, to my wonderful and supporting husband David, and my beautiful twins Luke and Lydia. Second, I dedicate my work in loving memory of my grandmother, Nancy Earline Rebstock, who taught me to respect differences and show compassion for everyone no matter their circumstances. Third, I dedicate my work in loving memory to my great grandmother, Cleona Bell Brookman, who instilled in me a belief that I could accomplish anything through hard work and determination. Finally, I dedicate my work to the students who allowed me into their lives and helped me to better understand adversity through the eyes of others.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would like to acknowledge my husband, David for his support and love throughout this process. There were many nights that you were like a single parent taking care of our beautiful twins, Luke and Lydia. You are amazing and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for being the man you are. I truly love you and thank you.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. Stanard my mother-in-law for taking time out of her life to edit my research paper. Also, I would like to acknowledge my Principal Mr. Pitts and Mr. Seagraves, as well as, my co-workers for being so supportive during this process. I would like to also acknowledge my school district for allowing me to conduct the research in this study to gain more insight in the field of education. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge all of the participants of the study for allowing me into their lives and their willingness to be a part of this process.

Thank you all so much.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study is to develop a better understanding of how African American students with disabilities in alternative schools make sense of their educational journeys. Critical race theory and disability studies (DisCrit) is used as a framework for the investigation of (a) the process of being identified as a student with disabilities and (b) behavioral factors associated with placement in the alternative school environment, and (c) how students develop characteristics of resiliency in the alternative school environment. Five African American students with disabilities who were currently attending or who had previously attended alternative school were interviewed individually about their educational experiences; participated in a focus group interview; and digitally recorded a reflective journal on their educational experiences before, during, and after attending alternative school. The researcher also conducted a document analysis utilizing the students' educational records. The data was compiled to form a narrative inquiry for each of the participants.

An analysis of the student's data evidenced four themes: Identified as a Student Placed "At-Risk", My Behavior Impacted my Education, Second Chance, and The End of the Story Can be Good. Students' perceptions of their educational experiences were influenced by the societal challenges of being identified as a student with disabilities, inability to be successful in the traditional school setting, and exposure to the alternative school setting as a pivotal point in the students' lives.

Keywords: alternative school, graduation rate, service learning, students placed "at-risk", resiliency

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Introduction

On a Monday morning in January, a boy whom I had never met before entered my classroom at Westside, the alternative high school program in Wentworth County. He was wearing the standard alternative school uniform which consisted of a white shirt, black pants with a belt, black shoes and a hooded black zip up sweatshirt. He had no book bag or books because that is one of the rules of the alternative school. He handed me several pieces of paper that he was carrying in his hands. I glanced down at one of the papers and saw that it was his Individual Education Plan. He found a seat in the back of the classroom where he proceeded to put his head down on the desk and pull the hood of the sweatshirt over his head to hide his face. Visible were his dark corn row braids, the honey colored skin of his forehead, and big brown eyes, which were cast downward. He looked around the room perhaps trying not to gain the attention of any of the other students in the classroom.

"Hi. I'm Mrs. Davis," I said in a greeting. "What is your name?"

He replied in a quiet pubescent voice almost impossible to hear.

"I'm sorry can you tell me your name again?"

"Joshua", he stated with his face still looking downward at the desk.

 "Well, it is nice to meet you Joshua. How long have you been placed in the alternative school?"

"Just long enough to make it to my 16th birthday and then I plan on dropping out of school and never coming back."

Joshua has the potential to be one of the 1.2 million students who drop out of the public school system each year. The national attrition rate for students has been labeled a "problem", a

"crisis", and even an "epidemic" due to the large number of students who do not graduate from high school (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009; Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004). Statistical research indicates that the dropout rate has remained between 25% and 30% over the past twenty years (Sum & Harrington, 2003; Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin & Marcotte, 2014). According to Heckman and LaFontaine (2010), approximately 35% of African Americans and Hispanics leave school without a high school diploma which indicates that minority graduation rates are noticeably below the rates for non-Hispanic whites. The national graduation rates for 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years are presented in Figure 1.1. Roughly, 39% of students with disabilities also contributed to the national dropout rate in 2010-11 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education found that 68% of African Americans students with disabilities did not graduate with a regular education diploma for the 2010-11 school year. The national percentages of students with disabilities graduating in the United States are presented in Figure 2.1. Although these rates have remained debatable, researchers have agreed schools must address dropout rates by implementing policies and regulations to reduce student failures (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).
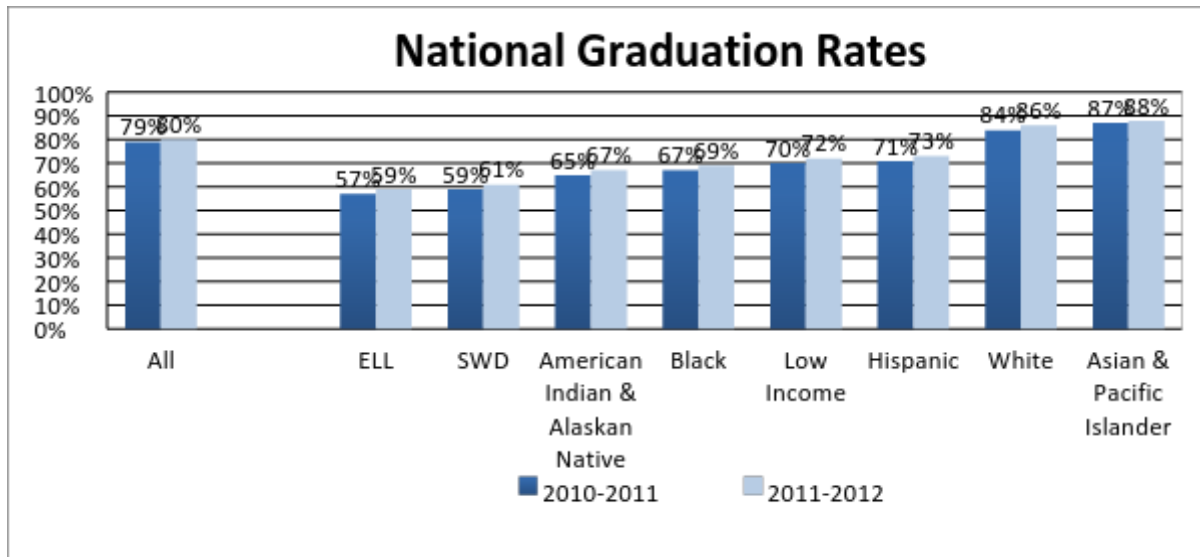
Figure 1.1: National Graduation Rates for SWD Students for the 2010-11 School Year and 2011–12 School Year.
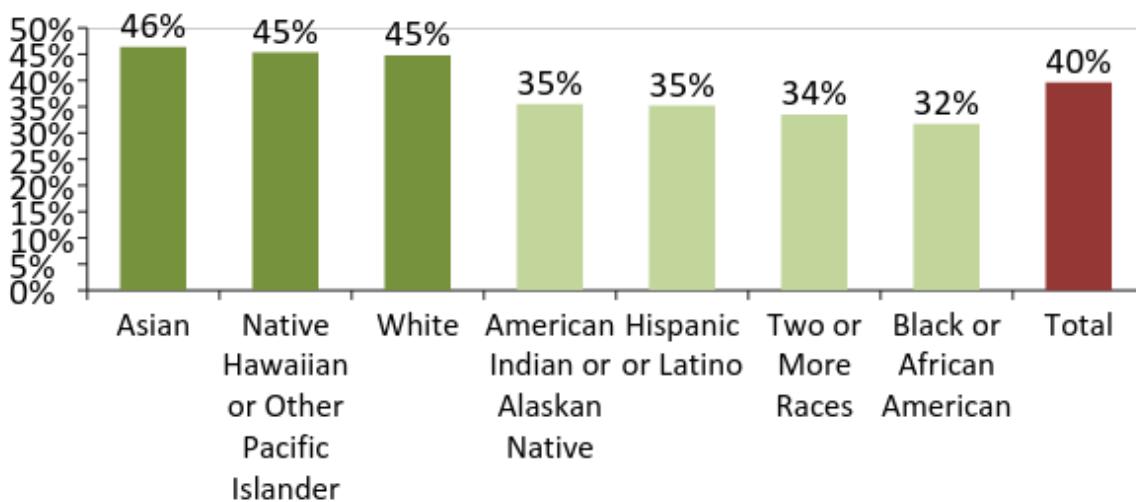
Figure 2.1: The Graduation Gap: All States, % of SWDs Graduating With Regular Diploma,

2010-11

Given the extensive nature of the disproportionately low graduation rates for African

American students with disabilities, it is essential that students placed "at-risk" are identified as

early as possible and provided with effective interventions in the school setting. Historically,

students from underrepresented groups have been disproportionately represented in special

education classes, which suggests systematic bias in the educational placement decision-making

process. African American students were twice as likely to be referred and placed in special

education services in comparison to white students (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). Through

the use of a multi-tiered model termed Response to Intervention (RTI), school systems are able

to identify students placed "at-risk" of academic and behavioral concerns in the classroom and

determine if the student requires special education services (Bender & Shores, 2007). The

Georgia Response to Intervention model is presented in Figure 5.1. RTI is a three to four tiered

multi-step approach to providing services and interventions to students in order for educators to

rule out or identify students who may or may not have a Learning Disability (LD) (Gresham,

Hunter, Corwin, & Fischer, 2013; Avant, 2014). RTI procedures can eliminate systematic bias

and disproportionality among minority students in the school system and assist in the true

identification of a student with a disability (Bender & Shores, 2007), thus, providing students the

academic and behavioral interventions to become successful in the classroom.

　　　Academic areas of weakness are often accompanied by behavioral issues. According to

Barr and Parrett (2001) children that do not learn to read well by the third grade find it difficult

to do schoolwork and the academic failures escalate. Students may begin to exhibit

characteristics of low self-confidence and self-concept and begin to display disruptive behaviors

in the classroom. When students do not respond to the academic or behavioral interventions in

the regular school environment the school may deem the actions as violent or nonviolent

infractions that result in out of school suspension, expulsion, and placement in alternative school

programs (Brown, 2007). The exclusion of students from school for disciplinary action has been

directly linked as one of the primary indicators of high school dropout. According to recent

research, there are clear and evident demographic disproportionalities in the use of out of school

suspension for certain minority subgroups of students predominantly African American students (Balfanz, Byrnes, & Fox, 2014; Brown, 2007). The percentages of students receiving suspension and expulsion by race and ethnicity are presented in Figure 3.1. Students with disabilities are also overrepresented among those excluded from the traditional school environment. The federal government enacted the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) stating that a student with a documented disability cannot be removed from his or her present educational placement for more than ten days if the behavior that occurred is a manifestation of his or her disability and/or if he or she was not provided appropriate services and supports, as outlined in his or her Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Brown, 2007). When disciplinary actions add up to more than ten school days in a school year then the disciplinary actions clearly indicate a pattern of behavior that indicates a need for a change in services or placement. The IEP team determines appropriate services that allow the student to continue to participate in the general education curriculum and progress toward meeting the goals outlined in the student's IEP, although in another setting. These services may be delivered in the alternative school setting (Georgia Department of Education, 2007, Code 160-4-7-.10).
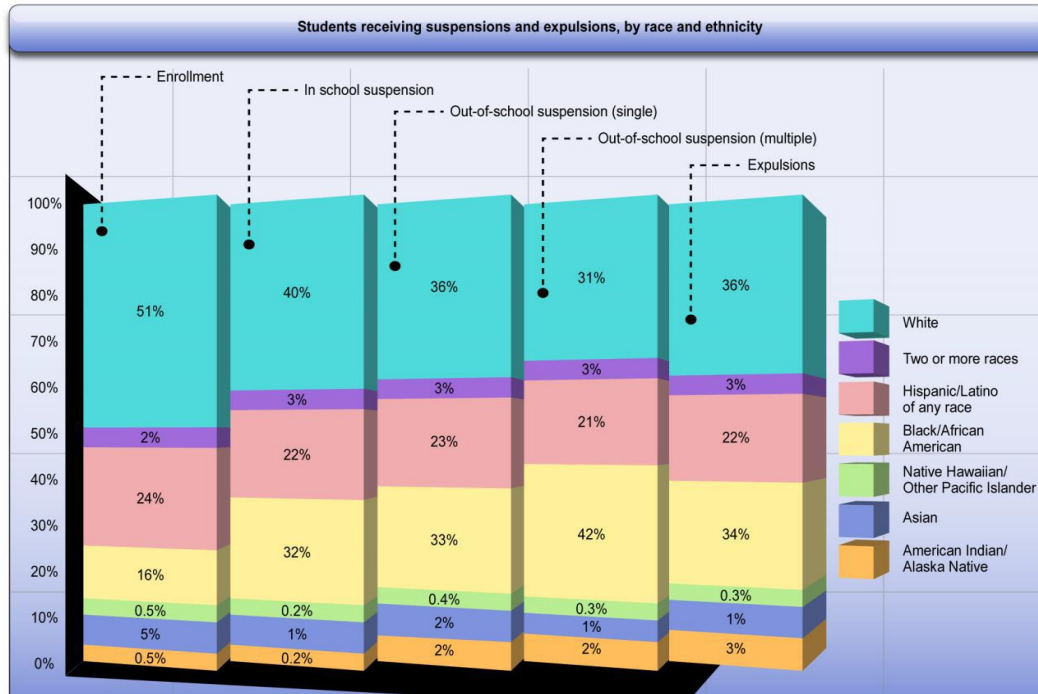
Figure 3.1 Students Receiving Suspension and Expulsion by Race and Ethnicity

Alternative schools are designed to provide students placed "at-risk" a second opportunity to succeed and to allow students who have failed multiple courses, been expelled or suspended another means of obtaining an education (Carswell, Hanlon, Watts, & O'Grady, 2014). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), reported that there are 10,900 public alternative schools in the United States and 12% of students placed "at-risk" were students with IEPs (Lehr et al., 2004). Seventy-four percent of the alternative schools intend on sending the students back to their regular schools but some students stay at the alternative school to attain a high school diploma. Therefore, alternative schools provide many students placed "at-risk" another chance to be educated. If the students placed in the alternative school become re-engaged in academic success then graduation rates amongst African American students with disabilities can improve (Izumi, Shen, & Xia, 2015).

Students placed in alternative school tend to struggle with their own academic identities and their place in the community (Barr and Parrett, 2001) because of previous academic failures,

along with negative encounters with teachers, family, and community. While in the alternative

school setting students receive small group instruction that supports the student's individual

academic and behavioral needs. Each alternative school has its own structure, process, and way

of re-engaging students back into the educational setting (Lange, 1998). Some alternative

schools are reconstructing education for students placed "at-risk" by implementing service

learning projects. Service learning can capitalize on the student's positive assets and resilient

attributes to achieve academic success. According to current research, students who are involved

in service learning were more likely to be more engaged in learning and relate their learning

experiences to real life situations (Nelson & Eckstein, 2008). Through alternative programs,

students who have had a history of failures now have the ability to re-engage in the learning

environment. These findings suggested a need for research into the successes-real and perceived

of African American students with disabilities placed in the alternative school setting.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative case study is to develop a better understanding of

how African American students with disabilities in alternative schools make sense of their

educational journey. Educational experiences are defined in this study as the student's

experiences in the school setting such as being identified as a student placed "at-risk" during

their elementary years of education and being provided instructional interventions to assist them

with academic and behavioral areas of needs in the school setting. Also, it includes the student's

educational background information of being identified as a student with a disability and being

placed in an alternative school setting due to academic and behavioral issues.

This study explored the critical race theory along with disability studies (DisCrit) as a

guide for the research methodology. This research described (a) the process of being identified as

a student with disabilities; (b) behavioral and academic factors associated with placement in the alternative school environment and (c) how the participants developed characteristics of resiliency in the alternative school environment. Five African American students (2 males and 3 females) between the age of 14 to 18 that were identified as students with disabilities in an alternative school setting or had previously attended the alternative school were interviewed individually, participated in a focus group interview, and used an audio-visual journal to reflect on their experiences before, during, and after attending alternative school. The researcher gathered past educational experiences by collecting data from the participant's school records, such as the students' RTI files, Special Education file, and behavioral referrals in the school systems database. In addition, the reason for placement in the alternative school environment was addressed. The researcher gained insight on the students' perceptions of their educational experiences that were influenced by the societal challenges of being identified as a student with a disability, inability to be successful in the traditional school setting, and the development of resilient characteristics in the alternative school setting.

Research Questions:

What are the educational experiences of African American students with disabilities before, during, and after attending alternative school? The specific questions this research explored to answer the larger question were:

1. How are students identified as a student placed "at-risk" for academic and behavioral concerns in the public school system?

2. What academic and behavioral factors influence placement of African American students with disabilities in the alternative school setting?

3. How do students placed "at-risk" enhance characteristics of resiliency in the alternative school

setting?

Significance of Study

Booker and Mitchell (2011) agreed with Brown (2007) that alternative schools can be

found across the United States and there is a rise in student placement in these schools, due to the

implementation of the federal government's enactment of Zero Tolerance policies. Brown (2007)

notes that school systems continue to misuse or overuse these Zero Tolerance policies,

particularly among students of color. The alternative schools have also become a facility to

educate students placed "at-risk" that are experiencing academic, behavioral, and or social

challenges. Students placed "at-risk" have a higher risk of failure, school dropout, and serious

problematic behaviors as compared to their same-aged peers (Carswell, Hanlon, Watts, &

O'Grady, 2014). The student population in alternative schools may include students with

disabilities and students from minority groups (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). However, there is

limited empirical research on the early identification of students placed "at-risk" and the

interventions schools have put in place to prevent alternative school placement for African

American students with disabilities. Furthermore, there is little information available on the

perceptions of African American students with disabilities placed in an alternative school on how

they perceive and make sense of their educational experiences.

Thus, this study explores the trajectory of African American students with disabilities in

the alternative school environment to see how this particular subgroup of students enhances their

characteristic of resilience in the face of adversity. The students are identified as students placed

"at-risk" of failure through the educational RTI model, found eligible for special education

services, and placed in the alternative school environment due to behavioral and/or academic

difficulties. The participants included in this study have shown an ability to overcome adversity even when presented with multiple educational risk factors. Additionally, this is an opportunity to gain a better understanding of how educators can improve the outcome of graduation for students that have been overlooked in the educational system. These are the students that have to overcome several academic and behavioral barriers that other students do not have to face in the educational system. If school systems focused on this population of students by providing the needed resources and supports that assist the students earlier in their academic careers, maybe the dropout rate of this population of students would decrease. This study provides an understanding of how the students' past, present, and future educational experiences have been impacted by being identified as students placed "at-risk" in the educational system, identified as a student with disabilities, as well as how the alternative school environment impacted the students characteristics of resiliency. As a result, there is the possibility to learn from the students' educational experiences and identify characteristics of resiliency that increase student's placed "at-risk" likelihood of graduating from high school.

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Definition of Terms

</div>

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEP) - Booker and Mitchell (2011), define DAEPs as a school designed to serve students who display disruptive behaviors that interferes with their learning or the learning of others. DAEPs are not a "school of choice" and are initiated by an administrative referral from the student's home school. DAEPs focus on correcting or managing the behavior of the disruptive students.

Students Placed "At-Risk" – Students placed "at-risk" exhibit academic, behavioral, or attitudinal problems. Many of the students have difficulty forming acceptable interpersonal relationships with teachers, school staff, or classmates and do not obtain academic skills

equivalent to the level of their peers. This places the students at risk for a multitude of negative outcomes like school failure and eventually school dropout (O'Shaughnessy, et al., 2003). The *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk* (JESPAR) is a journal solely dedicated to providing research-based information to professionals involved in improving the education of students placed at risk and promotes effective communications among researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in the field of education.

School Disengagement- Balfanz, Herzog, and Iver (2007), define school disengagement as a process of detaching from school, disconnecting from its norms and expectations, reducing effort and involvement at school, and withdrawing from the commitment to school or school completion.

Critical Race Theory- According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), the critical race theory is a radical legal movement from a collection of activist and scholars that are interested in transforming the relationships among race, racism, and power. The issues that researchers look at are a combination of civil rights and ethnic studies that allow the individual to look at a broader perspective of economics, history, context, group and self-interest through a racial lens.

Disability Studies- Disability studies examine issues related to and or between disabilities and various aspects of culture and society. Disability studies promote the importance of interpreting and analyzing disability throughout all forms of education, teacher education, and graduate studies in education (Gabel, 2005).

Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) - Dis/ability Critical Race Studies is a combination of two theories: Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies. DisCrit focuses on how race and dis/ability intersect in today's society. This theory focuses on ways to recognize racism and ability in the educational system to uphold notions of normalcy and values multidimensional

identities. The theory also highlights the psychological impacts of an individual being labeled by race or dis/ability which contradicts the western cultural norms (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy- Culturally responsive pedagogy identifies an understanding of culturally responsive teaching where teachers' display cultural competence and skill at teaching in a cross-cultural or multicultural setting (Gay, 2010).

Response to Intervention- Isbell and Szabo (2014), define RTI as a comprehensive framework that includes research- based instructional interventions to provide systemic support to students who are having academic learning problems. RTI is a multi-tiered method of teaching that involves all students being provided instruction based on their educational needs (Carpenter, Lambert, & Werts, 2009). RTI involves scientific research based interventions, continuous progress monitoring, and screening students for an evaluation for special education to determine eligibility for Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) (Krohn, & Zirkel, 2008).

Service Learning- Service learning is a concept in education that ties academic programs to school and community service projects and activities. The students gain opportunities to learn through peer teaching, cross-age tutoring, and public service activities that enhance student's value of giving, as well as, responsibility to participate in the community (Barr & Parrett, 2001).

Resilience- Resiliency is defined as the ability to bounce back despite difficult situations or exposure to severe risk. A resilient child can exhibit the following attributes: Social Competency, Problem-Solving Skills, Autonomy, Sense of Purpose and Future (Benard, 1993).

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the identification process of students placed "at-risk" through the implementation of the RTI model along with special education placement,

behavioral and cultural factors that influence disproportionate suspension and expulsion of African American students, students placed in the alternative school setting, and how adolescents can develop characteristics of resiliency in the face of adversity. The purpose and significance of the study were provided along with a definition of terms.

Chapter 2 provides the conceptual framework of Bell's Critical Race Theory (1970) and Ferri's (2003) Disability Studies to explore the two theories combined by Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, (2013) to create Dis/ability Critical Race Studies or DisCrit. An extensive review of the literature has been provided in four sections exploring the Response to Intervention model, behavioral factors that interfere with a student's education, alternative school placement and service learning that may influence African American students with disabilities characteristics of resiliency and resilient attributes in the face of adversity.

Chapter 3 outlines the research design utilizing a Narrative Case Study approach along with a precise description of each data source used in the study. As well as, how the computer program Atlas.ti 7 assisted the researcher in storing and organizing the data. The participants and the demographics of the alternative school setting are discussed.

Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the results. Participants' responses are provided in rich, thick descriptions to ensure the reader has a deep understanding of the students' past, present, and future experiences heard in the participant's voice.

Chapter 5 provides an overall discussion followed by the findings of this study. This study's findings have generated implications for educators in traditional schools, teacher preparation programs, district and school leaders, and state level policymakers. The chapter ends with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

The literature review is divided into two sections. The first section gives a comprehensive review of the conceptual framework, while the second section provides a review of related literature.

Literature Search Strategies

A four-step procedure was utilized to research the educational experiences of African American students with disabilities in an alternative school setting. A list of search terms was generated based on the multiple terminologies being investigated in association with dropout rates for African American students, the RTI model, special education eligibility, behavioral factors, alternative school placement of African American students, the impact of service learning, and resiliency in students identified as students placed "at-risk". The following descriptors were used: African American student graduation and dropout rates, African American students with disabilities graduation and dropout rates, response to intervention, identification of students placed "at-risk", implementation of interventions, special education placement, Cultural Responsive Pedagogy, "at-risk" behavior, alternative school, successful alternative schools, supports in alternative school, service learning, resiliency in students placed "at-risk", Critical Race Theory, Disability Studies, and Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit). The search engines of EBSCOhost, KSU Super Search, ERIC, Academic Search and Google Scholar databases identified many articles that were utilized in this study. Second, three books on alternative school, three books on Critical Race Theory, one book on Disability Studies, one book on Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit), four books on culturally responsive pedagogy, two books on RTI, and two books on resiliency were reviewed to provide in-depth information about the topics associated with the educational experiences of African

American students with disabilities in the alternative school setting. A literature matrix was developed that contained the books and articles from leading scholars of the key constructs, i.e. Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Beth Ferri, Geneva Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings, James Kielsmeier, D Fuchs, LS Fuchs, and JK Klingner. Lastly, the researcher attempted contacting Cheryl M. Lange a noteworthy scholar in the field of alternative school education and educating students with disabilities for any additional information that would be beneficial to this study.

The following literature review includes a conceptual framework which utilizes concepts from Derrick Bell's (1970) Critical Race Theory combined with Ferri (2003) Disability Studies. Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, (2013) combine Critical Race Theory and Disability Studies to propose a new theoretical framework that looks at race and ability, Dis/ability Critical Race Studies or DisCrit. The review of literature discusses the major contributing factors that are associated with African American students with disabilities placed in the alternative school setting.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

Investigating the trajectory of African American students with disabilities placed in the alternative school setting and their ability to develop resilient characteristics is a vital component in providing students the opportunity to graduate from high school. According to current research, African American students and students with disabilities are among the highest populations of students dropping out of high school. The researcher has been a special education teacher for the past fifteen years, been involved in the RTI process since the model was implemented in Wentworth County (pseudonym) in 2007, and worked in an alternative middle school setting for the last three years. While alternative schools can have a reputation as an

educational environment that includes drug dealers, the students that display aggressive

tendencies, and gang affiliated behaviors. The researcher has witnessed students in this

population re-engage in their education and show the same desire as their same aged peers to be

successful in their future endeavors. For example, a student that was identified as a student with

a disability in elementary school, referred to the front office for chronic disruption in the

classroom in middle school, and eventually placed in the alternative school setting for high

school, walked across the stage and obtained a regular high school diploma. Students like this

display characteristics of resiliency in the face of adversity. There are several outside variables

that can impact the resiliency in African American students with disabilities placed in the

alternative school setting and this is important for all educators to learn how to better assist

students.

While discovering possible outside factors that may impact the resiliency of African

American students with disabilities and current graduation rates, the researcher developed a

conceptual framework that is based on the works of previous researchers. An extensive literature

review found that research on educational resilience focuses on a more diverse population of

students that function on the margins of academic achievement. According to research, schools

are identified as learning communities supporting students' resiliency through involving them as

stakeholders in their learning environments (Washington, 2008). Through these social

interactions African American students with disabilities can develop the characteristics of

resiliency to counteract adversity in the educational setting. Therefore, this conceptual

framework utilizes concepts from Derrick Bell's (1970) Critical Race Theory combined with

Ferri (2003) Disability Studies. Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, (2013) combine Critical Race

Theory and Disability Studies to propose a new theoretical framework that looks at race and

ability Dis/ability Critical Race Studies or DisCrit. DisCrit looks at the construction of race and

disability in education and US society. Society has tried to prove inferiority and lower

intelligence in African Americans in order to justify unequal treatment of people of color. The

relationship between Critical Race Theory, Disability Studies, Dis/ability Critical Race Studies,

resiliency, and how the theories and factors influence how African American students with

disabilities in alternative schools make sense of their educational journey. Conceptual

Framework Representation (see Figure 4.1).

Critical Race Theory: Experiential knowledge of people of color and views this knowledge appropriate and critical to understanding racial subordination.
Disability Studies: How disability is connected to everyday human experience.
Dis/ability Critical Race Studies or DisCrit: Race and disability have been used to marginalize certain groups in society but values multidimensional identity while emphasizing the social construction of race and ability.

Trajectory of African American Students with Disabilities in Alternative School Setting

Past, Present, and Future of African American Students with Disabilities in the School Setting

Identified as a student with disabilities through the RTI model, behavioral factors, and placement in alternative

Characteristics of Resiliency in the Face of Adversity

Figure 4.1 Conceptual Framework

Critical Race Theory

Levinson (2011) suggested that the origin of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is not traced to the beliefs and ideas of one or two people, but is a combination of an ever changing response to the experiences of CRT theorist. The theory evolved originally in the 1970s based on the

historical battles against white supremacy. Some of the earliest work on CRT can be found in the writings by Derrick Bell (1992) challenging the traditional position of liberal civil rights. The view that emerged from their work was maintaining a colorblind approach to social justice known as Critical Legal Studies (CLS). There are some differences between critical legal studies and CRT, for example, CLS serves the interest of powerful groups in society, but does not truly address the experiences of individual of color (Tate, 1997). Bell (1992) believed that investigation of legal developments through fiction, personal experience, and the stories of people on the bottom illustrate how race and racism continue to dominate our society. CRT is defined as a legal theory of race and racism designed to uncover how race and racism operate in the law and in society. CRT can be used to address long standing educational problems mainly the experiences of students of color. CRT emerged as a need for people of color to begin to discuss the issues of race and racism in the realm of experiential to ideological (Parker & Lynn, 2002). CRT has been used to look at persistent racial inequities in education, qualitative research methods, pedagogy and practice, the schooling experiences of students of color, and the race conscious education policies (Lynn, 2006). In one ethnographic study, Vaught and Castagno (2008) looked at teacher's perceptions of racism. The finding supported the concept that awareness did not lead to empathy in teachers, but instead it brought to attention how culture is constructed along with racist framework. Districts were found unable to address their own structural inequalities in the educational setting but through CRT districts were able to identify the problem.

There are several key concepts associated with CRT from multiple theorists in the field of research. CRT began from the intellectual foundations of the critical social theory (CST) that addressed race and power. One concept that can be associated with CRT is interest convergence

proposed by Bell (1992) to explain that the white majority group tolerates advances for racial

justice only when it supports their interest. Racial identity is a degree to which a person feels

connected to or shares commonalities with an ethnic or racial group. Another concept that

supports CRT is centrality of experiential knowledge of people of color and views this

knowledge as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding racial subordination

(Levinson, 2011). CRT focuses on the storytelling and narrative analysis of everyday

experiences of people who have lived through the story (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

There are both pro and cons to CRT, as discussed by Duncan (2005), that the CRT

emphasis is on storytelling, but also argues that the stories are one sided, misleading, as well as,

glossing over the diversity. Some researcher have used CRT to create a division between the

races by supporting the theory that if blacks wish to have any academic success and achieve

increased socioeconomic status the individual needed to distance them from the fictive kinship

system (Harris & Marsh, 2010). When individuals only think of race as an ideological concept or

an objective condition we lose out on the experiences of everyday life, like when an individual

reads about equal opportunity linked to the idea that students of color should have access to the

same school opportunities where the word sameness becomes distorted (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Disability Studies

Disability studies examine issues related to and or between disabilities and various

aspects of culture and society. The studies promote the importance of interpreting and analyzing

disability throughout all forms of education, teacher education, and graduate studies in

education. Since 1999, the field of disability studies has included peer-reviewed publications,

conferences on the subject, and short-lived journals (Gabel, 2005). There have been several

scholars associated with disability studies, such as, Ferri, Connor, and Gable. The methods

associated with disability studies, such as, the "emancipatory method" look at people who were

disabled as the experts on disability. Disability studies look at the aesthetic of disability and how

disability is connected to everyday human experience based on John Dewey's explanation of

aesthetic. The studies focus on how disability can be invisible in a classroom setting. Disabled

individuals at times appear to look and act like everyone else, but have to work harder in the

classroom than their same aged peers. Individuals with disabilities have lived in the margins of

school, extreme economic deprivation, political isolation, and social exclusion (Gabel, 2005).

Dis/ability Critical Race Studies

Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, (2013) combine Critical Race Theory and Disability

Studies to propose a new theoretical framework that looks at race and ability called Dis/ability

Critical Race Studies or DisCrit. DisCrit looks at the construction of race and disability in

education and society. Society has tried to prove inferiority and lower intelligence in African

Americans in order to justify unequal treatment of people of color (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri,

2016) with the assumptions based on white supremacy. African Americans have been

disproportionately referred, labeled, and placed in special education ever since students with

disability have been recognized in the educational system. The diagnoses of disabilities rely on

subjective judgment from school personnel rather than biological facts. Researchers have been

found to be interested in how race and disability intersect, but there is limited research available

that looks at both areas in education. DisCrit looks at ways that race and disability have been

used to marginalize certain groups of individuals in society. DisCrit values multidimensional

identity while emphasizing the social construction of race and ability. DisCrit gives voice to a

marginalized population of individuals (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016). DisCrit looks at the

legal and historical aspects of disability and race, as well as, how whiteness and ability have been

enforced by white middle-class citizens (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). The differences can

be identified in achievement gaps and the over representation of students of color in special

education placement, economic inequalities, race, and disability (Ferri & Connor, 2014). There

can be a common misperception of DisCrit in that all social inequality is connected to racism

based on the complexity of intersecting identities. Students can experience multiple forms of

oppression but in order to understand the inequalities, society must look at the position to the

relationship of oppression (Ferri & Connor, 2014). There is a direct link between DisCrit in

education and the educational experiences of African American students with disabilities placed

in the alternative school setting.

Review of Related Literature

The intent of this literature review was to discuss the primary bodies of existing

research that both informed and framed this study. The review of the literature was divided into

five main sections. The first section explored the nation's current graduation rate for African

American students and student with disabilities. The second section examined the Response to

Intervention Model in correlation with how schools are identifying students placed "at-risk" of

academic failure, implementing interventions based on the Response to Intervention model, and

special education placement. The third section discussed behavioral factors that interfere with the

student's ability to be educated in the traditional school setting based on cultural aspects

associated with particular ethnic groups of individuals that result in disproportionate suspension

and expulsion. The fourth section described the alternative school setting along with how the

school provided students placed "at-risk" a second chance to obtain their education through the

various supports the school provides for the students. The last section focused on how a student

can foster characteristics of resiliency in the alternative school setting and how those

characteristics of resiliency impact the student's academic future.

The Educational Achievement of African Americans with Disabilities

Review of National Dropout Rates for African American

Historically, each state and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) have

calculated graduation and dropout rates in different ways using an individually defined standard

measure. There continues to be controversy over the accuracy of these rates (Tyler & Lofstrom,

2009). There are various definitions and formulas that each state uses to calculate dropout rates

and this may contribute to the significant differences in dropout rates reported across states.

Some states calculate dropout rates based on student enrollment and if he or she has received a

diploma as reported by school districts, while others use U.S. Census data or longitudinal survey

data (Lee, Cornell, Gregory & Fan, 2011; Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin & Marcotte, 2014).

The NCES provides the nation's dropout and graduation rates using two primary

sources of data, the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the Common Core of Data (CCD) in

addition to four different statistics; event dropout rate, status dropout rate, status completion rate,

and average freshman graduation rate (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). The status completion rate

includes the percentage of the population specified that holds high school credentials based on a

specified age range but is not sensitive to how long a person has taken to earn the credentials or

where the credentials were obtained. Many students count as completers but do not qualify as

on-time graduates which could have an impact on the graduation rates per state. Students who

complete their credits in more than four years are included in the event dropout rate. Status

dropout rates are measured by the population of students that do not complete high school

(Stetser, Stillwell & National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Based on these data sources

the national graduation rate is above historical trends and schools appear to be drastically

increasing the graduation rate (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

Furthermore, the U.S event dropout rate has shown considerable improvement in the

past few decades with a decrease in dropout rates from 6.1% in 1972 to 3.5% in 2008.

According to Suh, Malchow, and Suh, (2014), the decline in the dropout rate happened at

different times for Black and White students over a 36-year timeframe. African American

students experienced a decline in dropout ratings from 1972 (9.5%) through 1990 (5.0%) and

then experienced an increase from 1990 (5.0%) through 1995 (6.4%). The dropout rate remained

the same at 6.4% in 2008. The status dropout showed the same trend in dropout rates among

African Americans but indicated the rate declined from 21.3% to 9.9% from 1972 to 2008. The

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth showed that the dropout rate was 17.1% for black

students which resulted in a 1.9% racial gap in graduation rates (Suh, Malchow & Suh, 2014).

Heckckman and LaFontain (2010) agreed with Tyler and Lofstrom (2009) findings that the

graduation and dropout rates provided by the NCES do not depict an accurate representation of

current graduation rates for black students.

Researchers suggest that black students are more likely to withdraw from high school

due to excessive academic failures and not achieving on the level of their peers. A survey

conducted on 7,120 students in 95 schools in 15 school districts found that 44% of African

American children and teens self-reported that they generally receive C and D grades, 55%

understood less than half of the material read in school, and 48% completely understood the

teacher's lesson half of the time (Kafele, 2012; Storer, Mienko, Chang, Kang, Miyawaki &

Schultz, 2012). According to the 2010 Schott Foundation 50 States reported that only 47% of

African Americans graduate from high school nationally and in areas like New York City an

estimated 28% of black individuals will obtain a high school diploma (Storer, Mienko, Chang,

Kang, Miyawaki & Schultz, 2012; Bell, 2014). Findings have suggested one in four high school

students dropped out, and half of all Hispanics and African-Americans dropped out of school

(Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). The current national rate of

African American students who drop out of high school is 31% (U.S. Department of Education,

2012).

Dropout Rates for Students with Disabilities

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) more

than 5.7 million students ages 6–21 in the United States have been identified as having a

disability and receive special education services. Data reports indicate that students with

disabilities drop out of school at higher rates than students in the general education population

(Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, & Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2014;

Lerh et al., 2004). The national graduation rate is defined and calculated differently for students

identified as having a disability served with an IEP. The Office of Special Education Programs

(OSEP) has determined the dropout rate by dividing the number of students, 14 years old and

older, by the total number of students who have graduated with a diploma, earned a certificate,

aged-out of special education services, died, or dropped out. The CCD divided the number of

9th-12th grade dropouts by the number of students that were enrolled in the previous school year

(Lehr et al., 2004). The percent of students with disabilities dropping out has declined between

the years 1995 to 2000 from 34.1% to 29.4%. In contrast, Reschly and Christenson (2006),

indicated that the dropout rate for students decreased slightly from 1993 from 45.1% to 41.1%.

These reports show that dropout rates for students with disabilities vary widely in the literature

but does not underestimate that students with disabilities are amongst the highest student

population not graduating from high school. Statistics show that students with disabilities are twice as likely to drop out of school in comparison to their non-disabled peers in general education (Bost & Riccomini, 2006; Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, & Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2014).

While dropout rates can be different amongst students with disabilities, students with emotional behavioral disorders and learning disabilities displayed the highest dropout rates amongst all students. Also, students with mild disabilities obtained dropout rates double that of their typical peers (Bost & Riccomini, 2006; Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004; Reschly & Christenson, 2006). During the 2010/11 school year, researchers conducted a longitudinal study in Utah public schools that included nearly 4,000 students with disabilities, who started grade 9 in 2007/08 and found that more than 50 percent either dropped out or remained in school without graduating (Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, & Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2014). Statistical data has estimated that students with mild disabilities are at least two times more likely to drop out than that of their peers without disabilities. The 23rd Annual Report to Congress indicated that 28.9% of students with disabilities ages 14 and older dropped out of school and the National Longitudinal Transition Study showed that 32% of the students with disabilities dropped out as well. An estimated 27.1% of students with learning disabilities, 24.9% of students with mental retardation, and 50.6 of students with emotional disturbance dropped out of school (Dunn, Chambers, Rabren, 2004; Bost & Riccomini, 2006).

There are several factors associated with students with disabilities dropping out of school, such as, low socioeconomic status of the family, lack of books or reading materials at home, level of schooling of the parent of the same gender, low grades in school, prior academic failure, aggressive behavior, and school size (Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004). One study

looked at if there were similar risk factors between general and special education students who

dropped out of high school and found that the main factor for students with disabilities was not

just one issue but a culmination of school performance problems (Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren,

2004). Special education students that had one or more discipline problems such as being

suspended or expelled were significantly more likely to have failed a class and dropped out of

school (Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004, Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). Student

characteristics associated with lower graduation rates and a higher probability of dropping out of

school are called student "risk factors". These risk factors include poor academic performance,

behavior issues, low test scores, course failure, and weak school engagement (Tyler & Lofstrom,

2009; Thornton, & Sanchez, 2010). Noltemeyer, Marie, Mcloughlin, and Vanderwood (2015),

also noted that students in special education and children with poor attendance or achievement

problems were amongst the students to experience the greatest risk of dropping out of school.

One way schools have begun to identify students placed "at-risk" is through the Response to

Intervention (RTI) model.

<p align="center">**Review of Response to Intervention Model**</p>

Identification of Students Placed "At-Risk"

Isbell and Szabo (2014), define RTI as a comprehensive framework that includes

research-based instructional interventions to provide systemic support to students who are having

academic learning problems. RTI is a multi-tier model that provides access to the curriculum by

addressing the needs of all students who displayed areas of weakness in academic, social,

emotional, physical, and behavioral concerns in the classroom (Stanard, 2013). The term

Response to Intervention was first used to describe how a student responds to an intervention

implemented within the classroom that allows the individual access to the curriculum (Hoover &

Patton, 2008). RTI involves scientific research-based interventions, continuous progress

monitoring, and screening students for an evaluation for special education to determine

eligibility of a specific learning disabilities (SLD) (Bender & Shores, 2007). Stuart, Rinaldi, and

Higgins-Averill (2011), describe Tier 1 as primary prevention for all students. Currently,

Georgia's public school system implements a 4-Tier approach which provides layers of supports

that are matched to the student's needs (Georgia Department of Education, 2015). Georgia

Response to Intervention Model (see Figure 5.1).
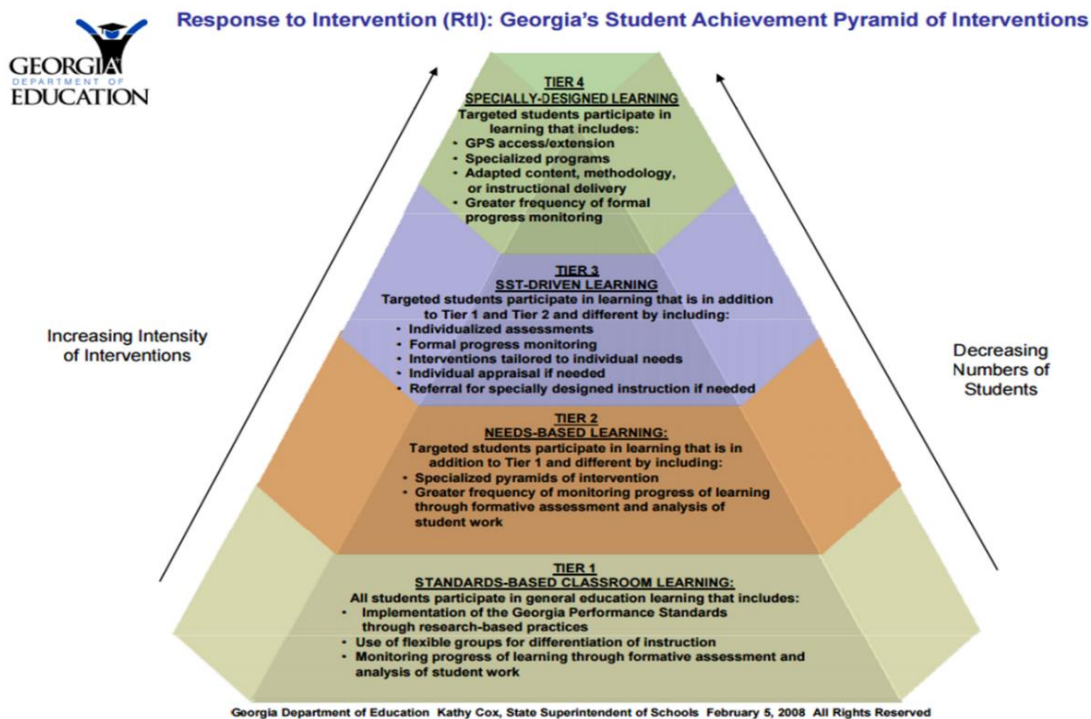
Figure 5.1 Georgia Response to Intervention Model

Tier 1 in the RTI model begins in the classroom by a teacher using an academic or

behavioral screener on all students at the beginning of the school year to identify students who

are potentially placed "at-risk" of failing. Once a student is labeled "at-risk" the student will be

identified by school records as in need of additional academic or behavioral supports. The

students identified as "at-risk" are monitored for 5 to 8 weeks as teachers use evidence-based

academic and behavioral interventions in the general education classrooms. Bender and Shores

(2007), discuss the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Support System at Tier 1

and attempts to decrease the student's behavioral concerns through positive reinforcement. Tier 1

behavioral support involves substantive reinforcement, behavioral contracts, and writing of a

brief behavioral intervention plan so that other teachers in the building are aware of the supports

to assist in decreasing the student's behavioral concerns (Bender & Shores, 2007). The students

that did not respond to the interventions are then moved to Tier 2 (Harris-Murri, King, &

Rostenberg, 2006).

Tier 2 is secondary prevention that provides scientifically-based interventions for

struggling students. Tier 2 is time sensitive in order to avoid a situation where a student needs

more support or has made the gains needed to return to Tier 1. Tier 2 involves the student

becoming more aware of their own behavior by self-monitoring. If a student continues to

struggle and is unresponsive to interventions then Tier 3 is recommended. Tier 3 is tertiary

prevention that includes intensive interventions for students in need of more support (Harris-

Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006). Tier 3 interventions lead educators to a more meaningful

identification of a student with a disability by accelerating the progress of low achievers. The

students that were unresponsive to interventions were students in need of more intensive

instruction, which are special education services (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010). Tier 4

provides students with specialized instruction which requires the student to be placed in Special

Education, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Gifted or other programs that are

delivered by specially trained teachers (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). Students may

be found eligible for special education services due to insufficient academic progress or

emotional behavioral disorders (EBD) (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006). Cramer and

Bennett (2015), suggest that underachievement and poor performance that lead to special

education placement can be explained by factors associated with low teacher expectations,

cultural differences in students' and teachers' behavioral expectations, language differences, and

poverty.

Special Education Placement

Current laws have been put in place to attempt to provide equal educational opportunities

for minority and high risk students but have fallen short based on the national data reports for

African American students (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). The Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA) was signed into law in 2004 and was revised to include student

performance assessments to be administered within a 60 day time frame to determine special

education eligibility. The evaluation process is based on a Multidisciplinary Evaluation Team

(MET) findings about a student's academic and behavioral functioning in comparison with the

list of special education criteria through the RTI model. RTI was initially developed as an

alternative for the identification of Specific Learning Disabilities and relied on documentation of

significant discrepancy between the student's ability and achievement through the use of

standardized assessment tools. The use of the IQ discrepancy model in the determination of SLD

has contributed to the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse

(CLD) students receiving special education services. RTI emphasizes the use of evidenced

based interventions before a teacher can refer a student for special education evaluation (Harris-

Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006).

Clearly, interventions should be designed around culturally responsive instruction and

discipline to counteract disproportionate representation of African American students based on

racial/ethnic groups. African American students are at the highest risk for being identified and

overrepresented as students with Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD). Banks and Obiakor

(2015), noted that one of the most common reasons that students are referred to special education

is behavioral nonconformity and if students do not meet behavioral expectations in the classroom

environment, then behavioral delinquency will likely continue. Research has shown that

unconscious bias, stereotypes, and inequitable implementation of discipline policies can be a

contributing factor in the identification and placement of minority students in special education

(Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006). Students that are physically and culturally different

from the mainstream population of children may have their actions misinterpreted and judged

unfairly by a teacher that do not have a strong awareness of their own culture (Cartledge &

Kourea, 2008). Teachers are the first to begin the special education referral process and they

need to acknowledge their assumptions about differences and culture. The teacher's attitude,

perceptions, expectations, and knowledge should be considered during the referral process

(Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006).

　　　　The first important step in closing the academic and behavioral gap for African American

students is early identification by student screening and structuring culturally responsive

classroom activities. Tier 1 in the RTI model provides students whole group instruction that is

structured, communal, dynamic instruction where student performance is monitored quarterly.

Tier 2 provides students' small group instruction to increase response rates and peer mediated

activities where student progress is monitored weekly. In order to be effective in the classroom,

teachers not only need to reflect on their cultural competence but identify the most active

instructional approach to meet the academic and behavioral needs of African American students

(Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Banks & Obiakor, 2015).

Review of Behavioral Factors that Impact Education

Cultural Aspects of Behavior

Approximately 85% to 90% of the teachers in the United States public school system are White and the students in the classroom are becoming more culturally, linguistically and economically diverse (Scherff & Spector, 2011). African American children constitute a significant portion of students being educated in today's school systems and there is a lack of teachers of color, particularly African American teachers. African American teachers make up less than 5 percent of the total public school teaching population (Ladson-Billings, 2009). When the discussion of race comes up in education many white teachers will state they have a neutral disposition on the topic to avoid controversy in the school setting (Scherff & Spector, 2011). These teachers, in particular can be uncomfortable acknowledging student differences and racial differences in their classroom. Teachers will at times say they do not see color and that they just see children which is termed color blindness. Color blindness is a dysconscious racism or uncritical habit of the mind that justifies inequality. With the increase in today's classroom diversity and the significance of race and color in American society, it is difficult to believe that classroom teachers do not notice the cultural differences of the children they teach. All teachers must acknowledge the differences in the students she or he teaches because if they pretend not to see students' racial and ethical differences then they do not see the student and are limited to meeting the students' academic needs (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

There are several factors that can influence student behavior in the classroom such as cultural and linguistic background, teacher background, and potential bias, as well as, societal factors that impact interpersonal relationships. The student's behavior can be perceived by teachers as problematic at school but the child's family may not perceive the same behavior as a

problem at home. The perceptions about a student's behavior can be viewed by the school as

maladaptive, but could be considered culturally normal in the child's family. Schools can

misinterpret student behavior based on negative stereotypes associated with the student's cultural

group (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006). For example, studies have indicated that

African American students obtain lower scores on teacher evaluations than White students

despite higher test scores because of the student's classroom conduct. Students who are

perceived as not cooperative are rated as having poor academic performance, highly

externalizing and less prosocial (Banks & Obiakor, 2015). Teachers may view African American

student's behavior in the classroom as impulsive, overly emotional, and out of control and feel a

need to discipline or control the child in order to have the student settle down and spend more

time on the task (Gay, 2010).   Research has shown that teachers tend to use a more punitive

approach to dealing with culturally diverse students in the classroom based on the

disproportionate disciplinary actions like suspension, expulsion from the school environment or

placement in an alternative school (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Banks & Obiakor, 2015).

Disproportionate Suspension and Expulsion of African American Students

According to Noltemeyer, Marie, Mcloughlin, and Vanderwood (2015), exclusion

from school has been used as a corrective punishment throughout the U.S to deter misbehavior in

the public school system for decades. The term expulsion is defined as the permanent removal

from the school and the term suspension refers to denial of school attendance for a specific

amount of time that may be ten days or less. The authors noted that suspension is often referred

to as out-of-school suspension (OSS) and is the most widely used form of disciplinary practices

in American schools (Noltemeyer, Marie, Mcloughlin, & Vanderwood, 2015; Lee, Cornell,

Gregory, & Fan, 2011). Approximately 3.45 million students received OSS during the 2011-

2012 school year (U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2012). This widespread

use of suspension has disproportionately impacted minority students served in the education

system. The 2000 U.S. Department of Education Report noted that African American students

made up 17% of the U.S. student population, and accounted for 34% of out-of-school

suspensions. According to statistics found by the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights

from the 2009-10 school year, Black students were 3.5 times more likely to be suspended or

expelled compared to their White peers (Suh, Malchow & Suh, 2014; Lee, Cornell, Gregory, &

Fan, 2011). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) point out that racial

disparities of suspensions of African Americans has increased from 37% in 1999 to 49% in 2007

and the expulsion rate has rose from 6.5% in 1999 to 10.3% in 2007 (Hoffman, 2014). The

suspension rates of African Americans have increased by more than 30% while Whites have

increased by 5% during the same time period (Suh, Malchow, & Suh, 2014). African American

students are more likely to be suspended from school due to disciplinary school policies (Gay,

2010).

       The discipline gap between Caucasian and African American students can be linked to

the federal influence on school discipline through the enactment of the zero tolerance discipline

policies. The definition of zero tolerance policies is that school or districts develop

predetermined consequences or punishments for specific offenses. Policymakers made the

underlying assumption that the certainty and seriousness of punishment would be a deterrent for

students to break the established rules in the school setting thus providing all students with a safe

and orderly school day. However, the concept of predetermined consequences or punishments

has evolved to include automatic suspension or expulsion of students for an extended list of

offenses, including alcohol and drug violations, physical assault and fighting, criminal damage to

property, and chronic disruption in the learning environment (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). These

patterns of discipline have worsened with an increase in the suspension rates.

The trends in disciplinary actions of African Americans students can be connected to

multiple behavioral office referrals for a variety of reasons, whereas Caucasian students are more

likely to be placed for easily definable offenses (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Suh, Malchow, and

Suh (2014), contended that black students suffered stiffer penalties in the school environment

which included suspension. Suspension not only excludes students from the classroom but

allows many students to be unsupervised at home thus permitting them to get into trouble in the

community (Noltemeyer, Marie, Mcloughlin, & Vanderwood, 2015; Suh, Malchow, & Suh,

2014). Research has found that the few Caucasian students who reach the level of removal from

schools are engaging in more extreme or severe forms of behavior and have been found more

easily reformed thus concluding lower recidivism. Ethnic minority students have been identified

by teachers as being involved in more disruptive behavior which is repeated multiple times and

the inappropriate behavior by children of color is less tolerated in the school setting. This

research supports the discipline discrepancies of African American students being placed in the

alternative school environment due to cultural differences in communication which include

verbal and nonverbal expressions amongst teachers and students. Administrators and teachers

may have an inability to see the limits of their own cultural lens and racial supremacy may be the

cause of disciplinary inequities between white and black students in today's school systems

(Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

According to Cramer and Bennett (2015), African American students with disabilities are

placed in more restrictive environments due to behavioral issues and are more likely to receive

disciplinary provisions such as suspension. Statistical reports have shown that students with

disabilities were suspended at twice the rate of non-special-needs students and that students identified as having an emotional or behavioral disability were even more likely to be suspended. Also, researchers have found that teachers tend to assume that students with disabilities are more prone to displaying behaviors that lead to disciplinary actions (Brown, 2007). This bias has been identified as a significant factor in the disproportionate rates of suspensions of African American special needs students being excluded from the traditional school setting. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) students with a documented disability cannot be removed from his or her educational placement for more than ten days if the behavior is a manifestation of his or her disability. Furthermore, the student must have received his/her documented services and supports based on the student's IEP in order to be considered for removal from the current school placement. School districts have begun to make it harder to establish that the behavioral infraction is a manifestation of the student's disability and can impose school exclusion as a disciplinary action (Brown 2007). Lehr et. al. (2004) and Lehr and Lange (2003) noted that the enrollment of students with disabilities in alternative schools is due to the protections set forth in the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act which allows school personal the authority to change the placement of a child with a disability to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting. The IEP team makes the determination the alternative school setting can provide the general education curriculum and continue to provide the student with the services and accommodations described in the student's IEP. Thus, supporting the placement of African American students with disabilities in the alternative school setting.

Review of Alternative School

Alternative Schools Placement

According to Cox (1999), alternative schools can be described as specialized educational

programs that take place outside of the traditional school system that provide alternative learning

experiences. In recent years, there has been an even greater inefficiency than in alternative

school placement and the students served in the educational setting. According to Carswell,

Hanlon, Watts, and O'Grady (2014), there are approximately 11,000 public alternative schools

and programs for students placed "at-risk" in the United States that serve over 600,000 students.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPS) are generally designed to serve students

who are not experiencing success in the traditional school setting due to academic and behavioral

difficulties (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Carswell, Hanlon, & O'Gardy, 2009). According to Lehr

et al. (2004) along with Foley and Pang (2006) students are often enrolled in DAEPS as a result

of suspension or expulsion from the traditional school setting. A student can be placed short

term and transition back to the traditional school or be placed long term until the student

graduates from high school.

Students placed in DAEPs usually come from the traditional school setting with multiple

unmet academic and behavioral needs and are amongst the highest population of students placed

"at-risk" of school failure, school dropout, drug use and other significant problematic behaviors

(Carswell, Hanlon, Watts, and O'Grady, 2014). Therefore, DAEPS can be seen as a second

chance for students that had been identified as "at-risk" of dropping out of traditional school

(Lange, 1998; Carswell, Hanlon, & O'Grady, 2009). Lehr et al. (2004) noted that DAEPS are

designed to meet a variety of needs which include preventing students from dropping out of

school by providing the students with educational options to address disciplinary consequences

or by providing academic and behavioral remediation. Izumi, Shen and Xia (2015), noted one study conducted in Oregon public schools that without DAEPS the school system would probably face a greater epidemic of students dropping out of high school. De La Ossa (2005) suggested that alternative schools should be an essential component to restructure the public education system so that all students have a chance to be successful in school.

Generally, DAEP offer small class sizes, low student to teacher ratios, and supplemental support services in order to decrease the likelihood of school failure and school drop out by reconnecting students placed "at-risk" to the mainstream educational goals (Carswell, Hanlon, Watts, & O'Grady, 2014; Lehr et al., 2004). Carpenter and Ramirez (2007) contend that students are less likely to drop out of school when the size of the school is smaller especially when the size of the school allows students to establish positive relationships with the teachers and staff. Schools can foster academic, personal, and social competence and may represent one of the most protective environments which encourage good problem-solving skills, academic skills, and individual talents (Doll & Lyon, 1998). Teachers who work in DAEPS can help students focus on consequences of specific actions and explore new options of responding (Miller, Fitch, & Marshall, 2003). Studies had found that alternative school students report higher satisfaction with their schooling experience, higher self-esteem, and more positive attitudes toward school, improved school attendance, higher academic performance, and a decrease in disruptive behaviors than when they attended the traditional school setting (De La Ossa, 2005).

On the other hand, some researchers have suggested that there can be a lack of effectiveness in alternative school programs because many alternative schools are a form of punishment for challenging students. Alternative schools have become a means of removing problem students from the traditional school with minimal regard to the supports needed to

enable students to become successful later in life. Alternative schools tend to have limited resources, minimal staff, and do not deliver appropriate programs to assist students in future opportunities. The grading scales can be very lax in the alternative school environment compared to the traditional schools grading policies. Students in the alternative school can receive a good grade for just completing an assignment versus the overall quality of the student's work (Cox, 1999). If students are not expected to learn the same content that the traditional schools deliver then the students identified with disabilities can fall further behind in the academic expectations needed to graduate from high school.

Lagana-Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi, and Hopson (2011) and Simonsen and Sugai (2013) indicated that about 12% of all students in the alternative school setting were students with disabilities. Thornton and Sanchez (2010) stated a majority of the students were students with learning or emotional behavioral disabilities. Some alternative schools have been providing students with disabilities an environment that re-engages students by providing a more successful school experience which in turn improves the likelihood of the student graduating from high school (Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). Alternative schools offer educational programs that focus on individualized instruction, basic academic skills, social services, and or work based learning (Lehr et al., 2004), which in turn helps students with learning disabilities become more successful in the school setting. According to current research most students who attend alternative school felt safe and cared for, had seen their grades and behavior improve, and felt supported by the staff. A study by Lagana-Riordan, Aguilar, Franklin, Streeter, Kim, Tripodi, and Hopson (2011), noted students acknowledged that the teachers in the alternative school setting maintained a nonjudgmental attitude when the students made mistakes and that they tended to focus on the student's strengths to help them gain the tools needed in

order to obtain academic success. Several students in the study found that alternative schools

helped them accomplish goals by giving the students choices in the classroom and allowing them

to feel in control. Researchers have suggested a variety of effective strategies that are

implemented in the alternative school setting which include supportive school climates,

preventative and positive practices, effective classroom management, social skills instruction,

adult mentoring, individualized and function-based behavior support, flexibility and choice,

functional assessment and curriculum along with effective academic instruction and support

(Simonsen & Sugia, 2013).

Nevertheless, there are several academic and behavioral efforts that can help students

placed "at-risk" be more successful in the alternative school environment. For example,

Thornton and Sanchez (2010), noted there are many approaches that can be relatively

inexpensive to implement that provide students a caring environment, high levels of expectation,

encouragement, along with opportunities for meaningful participation. Educators need to build

success into students' lives as much as possible by reworking the meaning of success so the

success includes improvement and personal progress; this contributes to a greater sense of self-

belief (Martin, 2002). One inexpensive way to re-engage students in the importance of their

education is through the implementation of service learning in the alternative school setting.

Service Learning in the Alternative School Setting

According to Cramer and Bennett (2015), students need to work with various people in

their environment and not just with individuals they are comfortable with in order to help

students learn the shared value of an education. One effective way for individual students to feel

supported or become a part of a community of learners (Ladson-Billings, 1999) is through

service learning projects. Alternative schools provide a conducive environment to implement

service learning project because of the flexible scheduling, smaller class sizes, more

individualized attention, individualized work pace, focus on career planning or vocational

education, and work-study experience (Lehr et al., 2004). Alternative school programs stem

from a humanistic approach which emphasizes opportunities for positive human growth. This

educational approach looks at the abilities individuals can develop and then focuses on helping

them to develop these positive characteristics (De La Ossa, 2005). Service learning is a

structured and interdisciplinary approach to engage students in meaningful service activities in

their schools and communities (Fredericks, 2003).

Currently, service learning is being implemented in one-third of American schools and

some states have recognized service learning as a way of teaching students character building

skills (Fredericks, 2003). Service learning is a combination of academic study with community

service in order for students to achieve both personal and academic goals. Students become

involved in broader goals of civic engagement and social justice in their communities.

Furthermore, service learning can be connected to educational reform by preparing students to be

lifelong learners and participate in a larger worldview (Eyler, 2002).   This approach not only

teaches civil responsibility but allows the older students to educate the younger students about

their community (Kielsmeier, 2010). Service learning also helps young people realize they have

valuable strengths and they can contribute to helping other people. This characteristic is very

important when students begin to learn how to collaboratively solve real life problems

(Kielsmeier, 2011).

Service learning is a developmental strategy that combines community service with

reflection before, during and after the service which is a potential intervention that can impact a

student's motivation (Nelson & Sneller, 2011; Denner, Coyle, Robin, & Banspach, 2005).

Several researchers indicated that service learning has decreased antisocial and violent behaviors, arrest, school failure and encouraged students to engage in problem solving, decision making, self-efficacy and competent behaviors. Service learning creates a connectedness to adults and community which reduces the student's feelings of being alienated (Denner, Coyle, Robin, & Banspach, 2005). Fredericks (2003), contended that students who participated in service learning found themselves involved in prosocial activities and were more likely to develop strong bonds to schooling, beliefs in behavior, and displayed less antisocial behaviors. Clearly, allowing the student to form bonds and relationships with one another and break down barriers within their community (Eyler, 2002). In a study conducted with 15 students with disabilities the results of using service learning in the school enhanced student self-determination and engagement (Miller, 2013). This educational strategy promotes youth empowerment which in turn builds strong self-efficacy skills (Nelson & Sneller, 2011).

Service learning allows students to experience real life situations that have a greater impact on their learning and character building traits (Nelson & Sneller, 2011). Service learning enhances characteristics of resilience in the classroom by providing a climate of co-operation, self-improvement, and personal best showing that mistakes can be a springboard for success (Martin, 2002). According to Thornton and Sanchez (2010), schools play a significant role in contributing to student's resiliency by providing the opportunities for long-term development, identifying strengths rather than areas of weakness, and nurturing protective processes in order for the student to become successful in the environment.

Review of Resilience in Adolescents

Increased Characteristics of Resiliency

Resilience has been defined as the process of, capacity for, and the adaptation to overcome challenging and threatening circumstances (Martin & Marsh, 2006). William and Portman (2014) and Thornton and Sanchez (2010), define resiliency as the capacity that an individual exhibits to recover or adapt to difficult or challenging life situations. Researchers suggest that resiliency is not a singular trait but is a result of ongoing and complex interactions between an individual's attributes, such as, intelligence, coping styles, strategies, sense of worth, and resources in his or her environment (Williams & Portman, 2014). Resilience is a common characteristic in most humans. If the systems are protected and in good working order then development can be robust even in the face of severe adversity (Masten, 2001). Furthermore, researchers suggest that individuals that exhibit resiliency adapt to social, emotional, economic, and personal situations in life (Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). Attention must be given when a study looks at resilience to the structural deficiencies in our society and to the social policies that families need in order to become stronger, more competent, and better functioning in adverse situations (Ungar, 2008).

However, researchers have noted that resiliency is linked to an individual's development and transforms as the individual transforms (Washington, 2008). Adolescents transitioning from childhood to adulthood experience structural change in development. The change in structure comes with social pressures that at times can lead to criminal activity, drug use, and dropping out of school (Nelson & Sneller, 2011). The protective factors of resiliency can be seen on individual's social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future (Benard, 1993). Thornton and Sanchez (2010) also identified protective

factors of resiliency in children who displayed stable peer relationships, demonstrated problem-solving skills, realistic future plans, a positive sense of ability to effectively deal with task, successful experiences, ability to communicate effectively, and being accountable for their actions. These protective factors are not personality traits that prevent negative outcomes from occurring but involve personal attributes, support systems, institutions, and resources that defy the adverse effects of risk factors (Williams & Portman, 2014). The three major protective factors that strengthen resilience are caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunity to participate and contribute (Truebridge & Benard, 2013). Thornton and Sanchez (2010), discussed four protective factors that nurture attributes of resiliency which were altering the risks or child's exposure to the risk, break the cycle that follows exposure to risks, develop positive self-esteem and self-efficacy, and create positive opportunities. One way to increase resilience in the students was involvement in "required helpfulness". "Required helpfulness" is when a student volunteers to work in the community. These activities led to a purpose in life and increase students placed "at-risk" ability to care about others by allowing the students to realize there are people in the world that even they can help (McMillan & Reed, 1994). School settings enable students to build characteristics of resilience in order to become citizens who are prepared to participate in society.

Findings by William and Portman (2014) indicated educational resiliency is seen when a child or adolescent are successful in school even with exposure to personal and environmental adversities. Student academic resiliency is a process of coping with changes in the environment, relationships, social connections, and stressful events in their academic life (Sosa, 2012). There are several risk factors that students encounter at school especially school failure. For example, schools that serve minority students may introduce risk factors by not

providing a supportive school climate, institutionalizing low academic expectations, or

delivering insufficient educational resources. Frequently, the pressure put upon students placed

"at-risk" makes it difficult for them to advance in the educational setting. According to Thornton

and Sanchez (2010), there are three factors that can support students toward their academic goals

which include the student's intelligence and temperament, family and family support, and most

importantly, external supports. Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, and Marcotte (2014), found that

resilient students utilize problem-solving skills more frequently than other students and their

ability to face adversity might be a contributing factor to decrease stress levels. In a study

conducted with 402 Australian high school students, researchers found that students exhibited

four predictors of resilient behavior, such as, control, planning, low anxiety, and persistence

(Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, & Marcotte, 2014). Buchanan (2013) noted that resilient

attributes can often be forgotten by students if the skills are not practiced on a regular basis and

that characteristics of resilience needs to be linked to student learning.

Impact of Resiliency on the Student's Future

African American students with disabilities face many forms of adversity in the

educational setting. These adversities can be barriers to achieve success in school and in the

future after high school- college, careers, and life events. However, Lessard, Butler-Kisber,

Fortin, and Marcotte (2014), noted although some students leave school before earning a high

school diploma, others that are equally placed "at-risk" do not leave school. Clearly, students are

capable of adapting to the school environment in spite of their disability, societal issues

associated with increased dropout rates, and cultural differences. Researchers have

acknowledged there is an educational divide, therefore, success in school is a marker for future

success which is extremely important for students placed "at-risk". Students without proper

support can become overwhelmed, lose motivation, and eventually drop out of school but these challenges can be overcome by perseverance from outside parties such as school, family, and community, as well as, the students own self-worth (Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). Educators can encourage the development of resilient attributes in students in order to increase life chances and aspirations of the students within the school and community (Buchanan, 2013).   Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, and Marcotte (2014), noted that a study was conducted on 12 students that overcame the risk of dropping out of school and were able to distance themselves from risks in order to seize opportunities and demonstrate a number of benefits in different areas of their life. McMillan and Reed (1994) discussed a similar situation where 19 percent of the students in a study that had been identified as students placed "at-risk" became individuals that acquired success in school with the establishment of positive goals and plans for the future.

Summary

African Americans with disabilities have been identified in research as one of the most "at-risk" populations of individuals to drop out of school. The prospects for students that do not obtain a high school diploma are very bleak and a majority of students are more likely to experience unemployment, underemployment, poverty, health problems, and at times incarceration. Students that have been identified with a disability already face physical, intellectual, emotional, or behavioral challenges that further compromise their future endeavors (Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, A., &Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2014). As the young black students move through the grades they are grouped as having the lowest achievement levels, excessively high suspension and expulsion rates and a disproportionate number of special education referrals (Kafele, 2012). Cramer and Bennett (2015), contend that corrective consequences are necessary at times but that teachers should consider the students out

of school environments before administering corrective consequences in order to avoid an

increased likelihood that spending time away from the school environment will increase the

student's problem behavior. Banks and Obiakor (2015), agree with Cramer and Bennett (2015)

that schools must examine issues related to classroom discipline, cultural and linguistic

differences, and pedagogical practices to further develop successful approaches for building

positive behavioral skills. Despite facing these structural barriers many students of color achieve

academic success when they are placed in the alternative school setting because the students

begin to reengage in the educational environment. Alternative schools incorporate many different

strategies to work with students placed "at-risk", such as, the use of service learning project that

encourage students to engage in collaborative learning experiences in order to develop resilient

attributes. Numerous African American students with disabilities demonstrate resiliency on a

daily basis in the face of adversity and overcome the barriers that have been put before them.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is organized in two sections. The first section reviews narrative case study research, while the remaining section describes the methods utilized to answer the following research questions: What is the educational experience of African American students with disabilities before, during, and after attending alternative school? The specific questions this research explored to answer the larger question were:

1. How are students identified as a student placed "at-risk" for academic and behavioral concerns in the public school system?

2. What academic and behavioral factors influence the placement of African American students with disabilities in the alternative school setting?

3. How do students placed "at-risk" enhance characteristics of resiliency in the alternative school setting?

A narrative case study approach is a combination of two qualitative approaches: Case Study and Narrative Research. According to Creswell (2013), both case studies and narrative research use a variety of analytic practices and are rooted in different social and humanities disciplines. Thyer (2010) defined narrative case study as a thorough examination of an individual unit, but the units are not limited to an individual person. Researchers use narrative case studies to understand stages in a process, and to investigate a phenomenon within an environment (Thyer, 2010). Case studies provide the researcher with a detailed examination of one setting or a single subject. They can best be represented like a funnel, starting at the wide end by scouting for possible places and people that might be a source of data. The researcher looks at the clues on how they might proceed in their investigation from broad exploratory topics to a more

directed data collection and analysis (Borgan & Biklen, 2007). Case studies involve the study of

a case within real life which is bounded by time and place through in-depth data collection

involving multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, in this study, the

researcher used multiple data sources from document analysis, individual interviews, focus

group interviews, and audio visual journaling from students who were placed at one alternative

high school in order to identify emerging themes about African American students with

disabilities placed in the alternative school setting.

Creswell (2013), asserted that case studies may focus on a small group or an organization

but that the key is to define a case that can be described within certain parameters. Most case

studies occur in real time so that the researcher can gather accurate data. The intent of

conducting a case study is important because it illustrates a case that has unusual interest and

needs to be described in detail. The intent of the case study may be to understand a specific issue

or concern which is called an instrumental case. A case study presents an in-depth understanding

of the case and does not rely on one source of data. An important component to understand is

analysis in the case study which involves a description of the case (Creswell, 2013). In an effort

to focus on understanding analysis, this study provided information on the process within RTI in

the identification of a student with a disability, factors for African American students behavior,

and a description of the alternative school setting. The information provided in this study will

support the trajectory of African American students with disabilities placed in the alternative

school environment.

Furthermore, narrative research is focused on gathering and interpreting the stories that

people use to describe their lives (Hatch, 2002; Creswell, 2013). It is a specific qualitative

design where spoken and written text provides an account of an event that is chronologically

connected. The study tends to focus on one or two individuals and the researcher gathers data

through their stories but reports on each of the individuals experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Narrative studies include life histories, life story research, personal experience methods, oral

history, and narrative inquiry but all are based on the belief that individuals make sense of their

lives through story. This type of study seeks to capture storied knowledge (Hatch, 2002). The

stories tell participants experience and they begin to shed light on who they are (Creswell, 2013).

There are several ways to generate data in narrative studies: oral history, research interviews,

journals, conversations, and field notes (Hatch, 2002). Within this study the researcher used

research interviews in the study along with oral history, conversations, and audio journaling to

gather data about the participant's educational experiences.

Creswell (2013), noted that interviews are the primary form of data collection in a

narrative study. During the interview participants may convey their thoughts in chronological

order: past, present, and future. The stories occur within a specific place or situation where the

context becomes important for the researcher retelling of the story. These oral histories consist

of gathering personal reflections of events from one individual to another. There is a contextual

focus, like a story told by a student in the classroom (Creswell, 2013). Narrative studies are

associated with critical thinking. The researcher focuses on the meanings that individuals

generate through stories and the researcher and the participant constructs the stories that are told

as part of the research (Hatch, 2002). Critical narrative involves the researcher and the

participants in telling stories that raise awareness and promote resistance (Hatch, 2002). There is

emphasis put on the interviewing process and rely on inductive strategies to get the informants

meaning of the story. Inductive analysis allows the researcher to get meaning from complex data

that has a broad focus in mind and in turn have a sense of confidence in what they report is a

detailed description of the social situation they are examining (Hatch, 2002). Analysis can be made by what was said, the nature of the telling of the story, or who the story was directed towards (Creswell, 2013).

While, narrative case studies can provide a detailed examination of a particular concern or issue, narrative case studies can have a few issues attached to them. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) discussed the issue of generalization where researchers in search of a setting or subject for a case study or a narrative study look for typical situation that look similar. In case studies some researchers will try to pick a setting that is not different but in turn can be an odd case. Researchers that go the typical case route are concerned with generalization and purposely choosing the unusual case just leaves the question of generalization unknown (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Likewise, generalization may occur in narrative studies due to the researcher interpreting the relationships and excerpts from the data. At times researchers predetermine categories that deceive the true meaning of the research (Hatch, 2002).

In case studies most researchers are skeptical of traditionally defined categories and do not assume things are called by the same name. The researchers feel the study should examine assumptions about what belongs in categories instead of the assumptions determining the research design (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In narrative studies the researcher needs to collect an extensive amount of information about the participant in order to develop a clear understanding of the context of the individual's life (Creswell, 2013). However, knowledge is storied knowledge which is not inferior to typical knowledge (Hatch, 2002) and the researcher must have a keen eye to identify the particular stories in order to capture the individuals experience (Creswell, 2013). Typically, when researcher uses the case study approach they must identify the case or cases which may be too broad or narrow. The researcher also must establish

purposeful sampling to gather information for the case but not having enough in-depth information can limit the value of the case study (Creswell, 2013). Narrative studies require the researcher to interpret the stories of participants which requires mental processes that go beyond what is called factual data and cautious analysis. The researcher must have the ability to use the interpretations to guide the research. Pure description is impossible because the researcher is generating data through their own interpretive lens and making choices in what is important to describe (Hatch, 2002). Creswell (2013) suggest that researchers develop a data collection matrix in which to specify the amount of information the researcher is likely to collect for the case study and narrative study. A data collection matrix can assist the researcher in creating boundaries of the case- how the case might be constructed in terms of time, events, and processes.

Hatch (2002) stated qualitative research emphasizes inductive, interpretive methods that apply to the everyday world which can be seen as subjective and socially created. Qualitative research procedures produce descriptive data through people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior. Stake (2010) provided a list of the special characteristics of a Qualitative Study that included that the research is interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic in nature. The researcher identifies the meaning of human affairs as seen from different views. The interpretations depend on the experiences of the researcher, the experiences of those being studied, and the experience of those to whom the information is being conveyed. Qualitative research is field oriented because it strives to be naturalistic by not intervening or arranging the order of the data (Stakes, 2010). This research approach applies to the study of the trajectory of African American students with disabilities placed in an alternative school environment because

the study relies on the lived experiences of the students through their perception of the events in their life.

In considering the purpose of the research, to examine the trajectory of educational experiences of African American students with disabilities in an alternative school setting, a qualitative approach utilizing an ontological assumption of a transformative worldview and a theoretical perspective of Critical Race Theory combined with Disabilities Theory (DisCrit) was incorporated through the interpretive lens. Creswell (2013) noted that the ontological stance relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics. The researcher embraces the idea of multiple realities as do the individuals being studied. The researcher has the intent to report the multiple realities with the use of multiple forms of evidence in themes using the actual words of different individuals presenting different perspectives. The transformative framework is that knowledge is not neutral and it can reflect power and social relationships in society. The purpose of knowledge is to aid people in the improvement of society (Creswell, 2013). The issues the marginalized individuals are facing are important to the study, such as, issues of oppression, domination suppression, alienation, and hegemony. The issues in the study will be exposed for society to understand and learn from. The researcher provides a voice for the participants in order to raise consciousness in order to improve the lives of the identified group of people (Creswell, 2013). The researcher may ask participants to help to design the questions which help to create the voice of participants.

Stake (2010) defined interpretive research as an investigation that relies on the researcher defining and redefining the meaning of what they hear. Individual's perceptions of objects or events and relationships are simultaneously interpretive. Qualitative research relies on the interpretations of the researcher and on the interpretation of the people in the study, as well as,

interpretations of the reader. The participants in an interpretive study often are individuals who are underrepresented or belong to a marginalized group such as gender, race, class, religion, sexuality or some intersection of differences (Creswell, 2013). The main interest of this study is to give voice to a group of individuals that are generally overlooked in our society and learn from their stories to better support the next generation of individuals that have similar trajectories in life.

Participants and Setting

Purposeful sampling was used to select five participants from one suburban alternative high school in the southeast United States (five African American students with disabilities, two males, and three females). The researcher conducted individual face to face interviews and a focus group interview with the students utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol. The student participants met the following inclusion criteria: (1) Found eligible for special education services through the RTI model (2) currently placed in the alternative school setting or within the last school year and (3) while enrolled in alternative school were exposed to service learning (4) are willing to participate in the study, which includes reviewing individual interview transcriptions. The purpose of considering participant selection was to select unusual cases in order to represent diverse individuals and describe multiple perspectives about the educational experiences of African American students with disabilities in the alternative school setting (Creswell, 2013). Each participant signed a consent form (Appendix G and H) and if the participants were under the age of eighteen their guardian signed a consent form also (Appendix F). All participants and guardians of the participants signed a HIPPA Authorization form (Appendix I) prior to any research being conducted.

There was one school involved in the narrative case study, Westside Alternative High School (WAHS). The school setting is located in a suburban county located in the southeast United States. During the 2014-15 school year, WAHS had an enrollment of about 106 students. There were a total of 78 males and 28 females at WAHS. The student body composition was as follows: 40 African American males, 12 African American females, 31 White males, 10 White females, 6 Hispanic males, 2 Hispanic females, 1 Multi-Racial male, and 4 Multi-Racial females. The faculty and staff consisted of 25 individuals. For example, "The alternative school student body composition is presented in Figure 6.1". The staff body composition was as follows: 3 African American males, 7 African American females, 4 White males, 10 White females, 1 Hispanic male, 0 Hispanic females, 0 Multi-Racial males, and 0 Multi-Racial females.
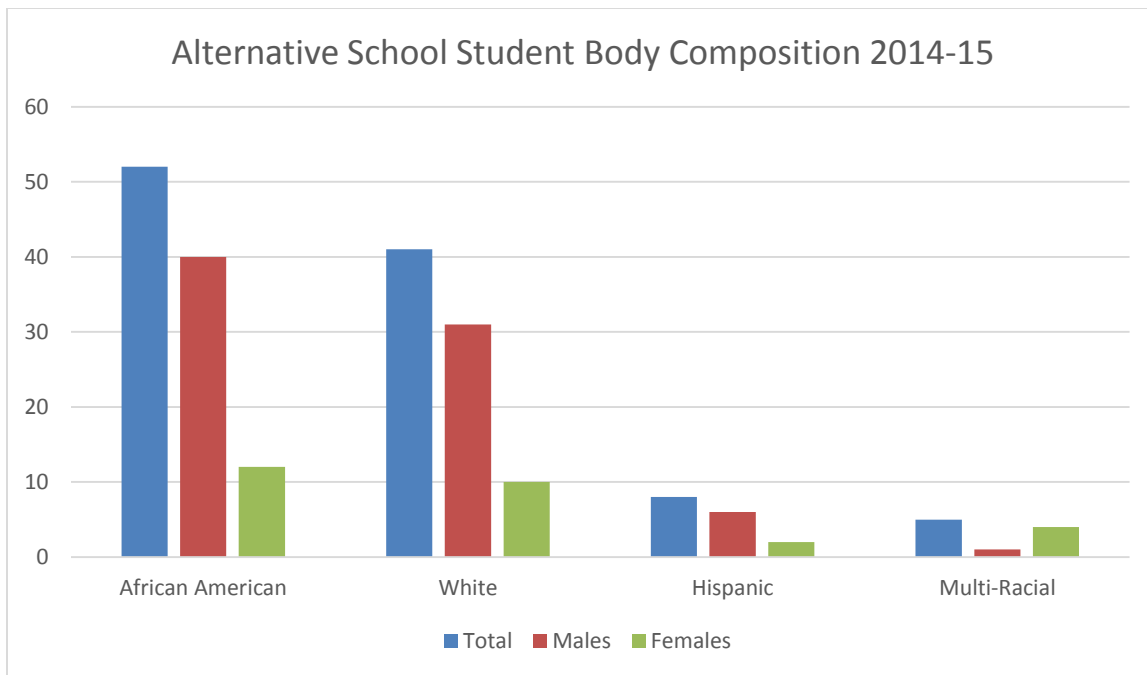

Figure 6.1 Alternative School Student Body Composition 2014-15

Positionality

As a researcher, I currently hold the position of In-School Coordinator for Special Education and RTI Coordinator at an Alternative Middle School. In my position, I provide

consultative services to the special education students placed in the alternative school environment, conduct and hold meeting to discuss the special education student's progress in the alternative school, I oversee the RTI process and collect data for the traditional schools, and teach a non-standard Life Skills curriculum to regular and special education student in the alternative school setting. With fourteen years of experience as a special education teacher and three years in the alternative school setting, I have become familiar with the eligibility process for special education students along with the individual use of behavioral and academic strategies to support the students, RTI process along with implementing scientifically-based interventions to support students placed "at-risk", and the academic and behavioral disengagement that occurs when students become nonresponsive to the traditional school setting. Over the years, I have witnessed and been involved in the eligible process for special education students that continue to struggle in both academic and behavioral areas of weakness after being identified as a student with disabilities. I have seen the school's work on interventions and provide support students placed "at-risk" but continue to see their endeavors not work due to the student being placed in the alternative school setting. I have witnessed the students coming into a punitive environment and making the statement that they cannot wait until they are able to drop out of school but after a few months in the alternative school environment the students begin to become more involved in their school work, display appropriate behaviors, and begin to discuss what college may be like for them when they get older. Individuals could argue these professional positions may influence some bias in the current research, the positions also hold a wealth of knowledge in the exploration of the trajectory of African American students with disability in the alternative school setting. Previous experience may also be viewed as the researcher having insight about the research. My experiences working with students placed "at-

risk" and having hopes and dreams for their success in the future has generated an interest in

further studying how the students view their experiences in the educational system. These

experiences, prior literature, and the need to expand upon the current literature assisted my vision

for this study.

Data Collection

Data sources included individual semi-structured interviews with five African American

students placed or previously placed in the alternative high school setting, one focus group

interview with two of the participants, audio visual journal reflections, and document analysis of

the RTI files of students identified as students with disabilities, as well as, the student's

behavioral records. RTI files include: reason for special education referral, background

information, progress monitoring in area of concern, interventions, and placement in special

education services. Behavioral records of the participant were analyzed along with reason for

placement in the alternative school setting. Students used an audio visual device to record

journal reflections on how the students envision their future. The data reduction matrix is

presented in Figure 8.1.

Individual Interviews: The interview is commonly used among researchers for gathering data in

the narrative process. Interviews are a purposeful conversation between two people that is

directed by one individual in order to get information from the other. Interviews are used to

gather descriptive data in the participant's own words (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Interviews are

used to obtain information or interpretations held by the person being interviewed in order to

find out about "a thing" that the researcher is unable to observe themselves (Stake, 2010). The

purpose of the interview was to gather the oral history of the participant's educational

experiences from elementary school, middle and high school years. Individual interviews were

conducted with five African American students with disabilities from the alternative high school. The multiple participants aided in providing a rich description of the trajectory of African American students with disabilities in the alternative school setting. Individual interviews were conducted face to face at a designated location in order to gain insight into the students lived experiences. The researcher used semi-structured interview protocol to gain the participants perceptions on the trajectory of the student's experiences. The initial interview included relatively open-ended questions that focused on a particular topic and were guided by some general questions allowing the interviewee to tell his or her story in a personal manner. The researcher encouraged the participant to talk about the area of interest and then probed more deeply, picking up on the topics and issues the respondent began talking about (Bogan & Biklen, 2007). Structured questions were employed later in the follow-up interviewing process in order to get comparable data that focused on the particular topics that emerged from the initial interview (Bogan & Biklen, 2007). An interview protocol or interview guide with approximately ten open ended questions was used to guide the interview process (Creswell, 2013). The interview questions are presented in Appendix A.   All interviews were digitally recorded in order to allow the researcher to transcribe the interview at a later date.

Mini Focus Group: Focus groups are group interviews that are structured in order to foster a conversation among the participants about a particular issue. The participants of the study are brought together to discuss a general topic and stimulate a conversation that contains multiple perspectives from the group participants (Bogan & Biklen, 2007). Focus group interviews can yield some of the best qualitative data when the interviewees are similar and cooperative with one another. This is one of the best methods to collect data when time is limited or when interviewees are uncomfortable to provide information in a one on one interview (Creswell,

2013). A structured focus group protocol was utilized to initiate the group discussion and assist the researcher in leading the conversation back on topic if the topic becomes lost in conversation. The focus group interview questions are presented in Appendix B. The focus group allowed the researcher to explore the participants' perceptions of how service learning impacted their lives while attending the alternative high school.

Document Analysis: Qualitative researchers are using documents as a primary resource or a supplemental resource of data. Documents fit in the criteria of data rich in description but the researcher can use the resources in a manner that is naturalist, inductive, and concerned with the process of how the document is constructed. Schools produce what are called official documents and these documents can be readily available to the researcher (Bogan & Biklen, 2007). Documents can give the researcher alternative insight into the way that people think and behave. Documents provide physical evidence on how the participate interacts in a setting without interfering with the flow of the specific behavior. Researchers can obtain a sense of history related to the context of the case (Hatch, 2002). The review of documents was conducted using through RTI documents, special education eligibility reports, and behavioral data in the school database. The RTI documents were used to identify interventions used prior to being identified a student with disabilities, the special education eligibility document provided information on the student's disability, and the behavioral records assisted in identifying reoccurring behaviors and placement of the student in the alternative school environment. All documents were reviewed in a secure location where student files are kept at the Central Office of the school district. The documents provided the researcher information of the students educational past in order to document the trajectory of the students lived experiences. The document analysis collection forms are presented in Appendix D and Appendix E.

Audiovisual Reflective Journaling: Audiovisual journaling is a popular data collection process in case studies and narrative research (Creswell, 2013). Audiovisual journaling is a powerful means of capturing data and can improve the quality of the study but should not be used as the primary source of data. This form of data can be thought of as having a documentary function or a way to preserve a record in the way a historian would have preserved a written record. This type of data is what is known as unobtrusive data. Audiovisual journaling provides a way of capturing the face to face social behavior in greater detail. The audiovisual video recording assisted the researcher in producing very detailed transcripts of what occurred and what was said in order to ensure accuracy of the data. The researcher captured facial expressions, nonverbal communication, and emotion that are often missed in field notes. Audiovisual recording allowed the researcher to validate individual interpretations by going back to the original recorded data (Hatch, 2002). The audiovisual journaling was obtained through a personal visual recorder given to each participant in the study for one week to visually record their responses to 12 question that focus on resiliency and their future life goals. The student reflective audiovisual journal questions are presented in Appendix C. The audiovisual journaling allowed students to identify aspects of their future and record their responses. All audiovisual recording equipment was kept and reviewed in a secure location. The audiovisual journal provided the researcher information of the student's educational future in order to document the trajectory of the student's lived experiences.

Step –by-Step Process of Data Collection
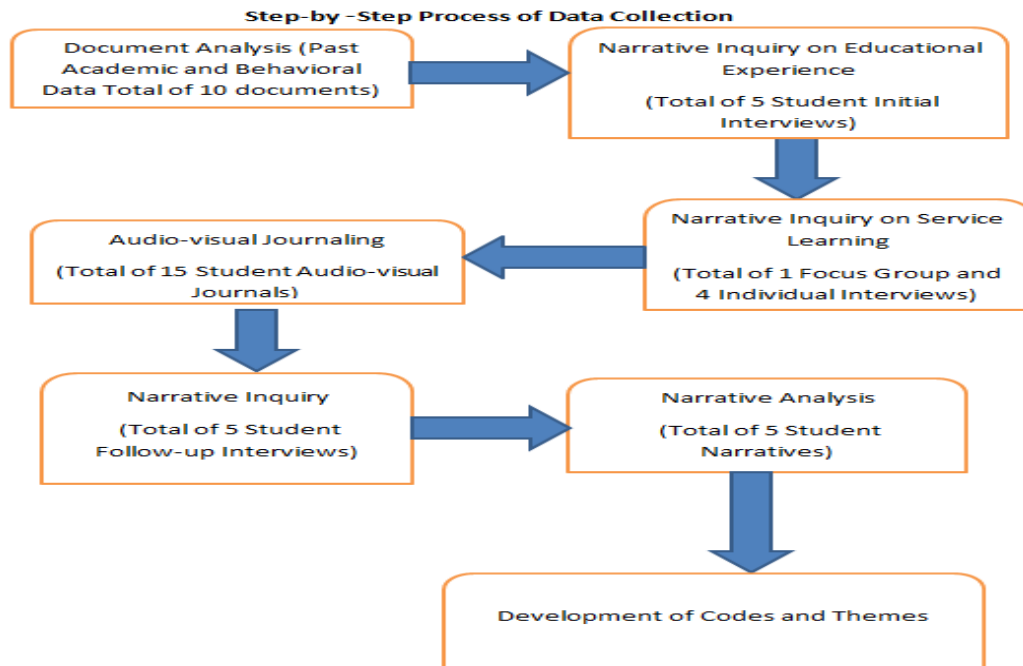
Figure 7.1 Step-by Step Data Collection Process

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Research data for this qualitative narrative case study was collected through individual interviews, a focus group, audiovisual reflective journaling, and document analysis. While data was collected, the researcher transcribed the initial interviews, focus group interview, the follow up interviews, and the audiovisual recordings to compose the participant's narrative story. The step by step process of data collection is presented in Figure 7.1.   Interviews and focus groups were recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed word for word using a personal computer and the Microsoft 2007 computer program. Transcriptions were kept on a password protected computer. After the researcher transcribed the data each participant in the study member checked the information for accuracy. The researcher then developed each of the

narratives inquiries and again the participants' member checked the information for accuracy.

Transcripts of interviews, focus group interviews, audiovisual journaling and document analysis

were coded to develop categories and recurring themes.   The data was coded utilizing Atlas.ti 7.

Transcriptions and document analysis were kept on a password protected laptop computer that

the researcher keeps in a secure location. All Participants were given pseudonyms to protect

confidentiality.

Data Reduction Matrix

What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this?	What kind of data will answer the questions?	Where can I find the data?	Whom do I contact for access?	Timeline for acquisition
How were the students identified as "at-risk" for academic and behavioral deficits and identified as a student with a disability?	To investigate the students past educational experiences.	Student School Records/RTI Files/ Special Education Eligibility/Document Analysis	Student School Records/RTI Files/ Special Education Eligibility	Alternative School Administrators, District RTI Coordinator, District Special Education Coordinator, Students and Parents of Students	Obtain student and parent consent forms-Jan. Analyze Student School Records Feb.
What behaviors did the student exhibit to be placed in the alternative school setting?	To investigate the students past educational experiences.	Student School Behavioral Records/Document Analysis	Student School Behavioral Records	Alternative School Administrators, Students and Parents of Students	Obtain student and parent consent forms-Jan. Analyze Student School Records Feb.
How do alternative schools provide "at risk" students a second chance?	To investigate the difference in alternative setting and the traditional school setting.	Interviews/Focus Group interviews/Students Digital Journaling	Narrative Inquiry	Students and Parents of Students	Obtain student and parent consent forms-Jan. Interview Feb-March. Focus Group March Digital Journaling Feb.-March
What impact did service learning have on "at-risk" students' educational successes?	To identify if service learning has a positive impact on the students placed in alternative school.	Interviews/Focus Group interviews/Students Digital Journaling	Narrative Inquiry	Students and Parents of Students	Obtain student and parent consent forms-Jan. Interview Feb.-March Focus Group Feb.-March Digital Journaling Feb.-March.
How do students display characteristics of resiliency in the face of adversity?	To see what characteristics these students display to overcome the statistical data associated with African American students graduation rate?	Interviews/Focus Group interviews/Students Digital Journaling	Narrative Inquiry	Students and Parents of Students	Obtain student and parent consent forms-Jan. Interview Feb.-March Focus Group Feb.-March Digital Journaling Feb.-March

Figure 8.1

Credibility and Trustworthiness

The following techniques were used in the study to assure credibility, trustworthiness,

transferability, and dependability. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness the researcher used

member checking, triangulation by looking at interviews, document analysis, literature and

personal notes. Member checking was utilized by presenting the transcribed recordings and a draft of the final report to the participant providing the information and asking for corrections of comments (Stake, 2010). Triangulation is the use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide collaborating evidence (Creswell, 2013). Prolonged engagement was employed in order to build trust with the participants by learning the culture and checking for misinformation due to the length of time in the study (Creswell, 2013). Transferability was implemented through the use of thick description which allows the reader to make decisions (Creswell, 2013). Dependability was implemented through the inquiry audit that allows for external consultation from the dissertation committee that looked at the research throughout the process and approved steps of the study (Creswell, 2013).

Limitations of the Study

This study has limitations that should be considered. The study was conducted at one alternative school with five participants (3 females and 2 males). In the beginning of the study, it was a goal to collect extensive information about the participants in order to understand the context of the individual's educational experiences from elementary school to where the student's see themselves in the future. This study examined the educational experiences of only a few students that attended one alternative school. One key limitation in this study was generalizability. Since the study is a narrative case study the researcher's goal was not to generalize the student's educational experiences but to elicit the stories of a group of individuals. Each of the stories were different but there were commonalities across the educational experiences of the participants. The student's stories were useful for the researcher to learn more about how African American students with disabilities in alternative school perceive their educational experiences in order to overcome adversity. The researcher eliminated information

that was situational to the case which allowed the contextual effects to balance each other out

(Stake, 2010) so the researcher did not generalize the situation.

Another limitation in the study was that the researcher was trying to gain more insight on

how the student's racial identity may have impacted their educational experiences. The

participants did not acknowledge any known differences in their educational experiences as

compared with their white peer counterparts even when directly asked if they felt that a white

student would have experienced the same consequences for their actions. The researcher was a

white female interviewing five African American students and the participants may have been

more comfortable talking about racial issues if the researcher was from the same ethnic

background as the participants. In light of identifying this limitation, it can be assumed that the

results accurately represent the student's own educational experiences and how they wanted to

describe the experiences to the research.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

In efforts to answer the research question, a narrative case study design using multiple

sources of qualitative data was utilized to examine the educational experiences of African

American students with disabilities in an alternative school setting. A qualitative approach

utilizing an ontological assumption of a transformative worldview and a theoretical perspective

of Critical Race Theory combined with Disabilities Theory (DisCrit) was incorporated through

the interpretive lens. Five African American participants who attended one alternative high

school were involved in the narrative case study. Data from this qualitative narrative case study

was collected through individual interviews, a focus group interview with two of the participants,

audio visual reflective journaling, document analysis, and a final follow-up interview.

Qualitative findings were triangulated through multiple data sources. Credibility and

trustworthiness was established through triangulation by looking at interviews, document

analysis, previous literature, and personal notes. Member checking was utilized by presenting the

transcribed recordings and a draft of the final report to the participants. Prolonged engagement

was employed in order to build trust with the participants by learning the culture and checking

for misinformation due to the length of time in the study. Transferability was implemented

through the use of thick description. Dependability was implemented through the inquiry audit

that allowed for external consultation from the dissertation committee.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop a better understanding of how

African American students with disabilities in alternative school make sense of their educational

journeys. In this chapter, the process of how multiple data sources were used to create student

narratives that were later analyzed in order to organize, synthesize, and break the data down into

manageable codes and themes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) in an attempt to answer the following

research questions: What is the lived experience of African American students with disabilities

before, during, and after attending alternative school?. The researcher applied the following

analytic questions to support the analysis results: (a) how are students identified "at-risk" for

academic and behavioral concerns in the public school system, (b) what behavioral and academic

factors influence placement of African American students with disabilities in the alternative

school setting, and (c) how do students placed "at-risk" enhance characteristics of resiliency in

the alternative school setting.

First, the students' (two African American boys and three African American girls) past

educational experiences were gathered from their confidential school records. This information

allowed the researcher to gain insight on when the students were placed "at-risk", what academic

areas the students exhibited areas of weakness in; what interventions were utilized to remediate

the academic areas of weakness; and when the students were identified as a students with a

disability. The researcher was also able to gather information on the student's prior behavior that

may have attributed to them being placed in the alternative school environment. Second, the

students were interviewed individually in interviews ranging from 30 minutes to one hour in

length to hear their perceptions on how they perceived their education in elementary school,

middle school, high school, as well as, their placement in the alternative school setting. Third, two students participated in a focus group discussion on their exposure to service learning and how service learning impacted their educational experience in the alternative school setting, the focus group ranged from twenty to thirty minutes in length. Lastly, the students' individually audio visually recorded reflective journals on how they perceived their futures in order to identify characteristics of resilience. These audiovisual journal entries ranged from ten to fifteen minutes in length. After the document analysis was performed, initial interviews, and audio visual reflection journaling were transcribed and reviewed, a second, follow up interview ranging from 30 minutes to one hour in length was conducted with each of the participants to gather more in-depth information on any information that was not discussed in the initial interview.

Once all of the data were collected and transcribed the researcher composed a narrative story for each of the participants using information found in their personal school records, responses from the initial interviews, focus group interview, audio visual journals, and follow-up interviews. In order to seek internal validity while analyzing the data, Stake (2010) recommended member checking to ensure accuracy and protect human subjects from being hurt. Transcriptions of the interviews and document analysis were given to the participants for confirmation and any needed corrections. Furthermore, in the follow- up interviews, the researcher was able to readdress specific questions to gain further clarification to the participant's previous statement. The results in this section were determined by careful analysis of the participant's educational documents, participant's responses, and narrative stories to provide a trajectory of the educational experiences of each of the individuals in the study. The researcher then analyzed the five participants' narrative stories to identify common codes and themes. The students' complete Narrative Inquiry may be found in Appendix J. The Response to

Intervention and behavioral data from the participant's personal school records was typed

directly onto a table labeled Comparing Academic Characteristics and Comparing Behavioral

Characteristics Document Analysis (Appendix K). All participants in this study choose their own

pseudonyms in place of their real names for confidentiality purposes, as well as, identifiable

teacher names and locations within their story have been replaced with pseudonyms determined

by the researcher.

Student Descriptions

John

John is an African American male 18 almost 19 years of age and in the last few months

of his 12th grade year at Westside Alternative High School. He seemed somewhat reserved in

nature. He has shoulder length dreads and a slim build with several tattoos on both arms. One

tattoo is of his mother's name and another tattoo said faith, love, and hope. He had a cross on one

arm and his uncle's name with the date he was born and the date he died. This tattoo of his

uncle's name was a dedication because John's uncle had always showed John the difference

between right and wrong when he was growing up. He said that his uncle had always been there

for him when he needed him. John was well mannered and frequently replied to the questions

with yes ma'am or no ma'am. When asked how he described himself John replied, "I describe

myself as confident, positive, and put my mind to anything that you want to be." John chose to

attend the alternative school program in hopes that he could recover lost credits and graduate on

time. John is scheduled to graduate in May, on time, at the age of 18. He will be the second

individual in his family to have obtained a high school diploma.

PJ

PJ is 18 years old and will be 19 in September. She is in the 12th grade at Westside

Alternative High School. She is an African American female. She was hesitant answering the

interview questions in the beginning but by the second interview session she was very relaxed

and comfortable in talking about her educational experiences. She is an individual that must first

get to know someone before opening up to them. She said several times during the interview

session "Oh, I forgot we were recording this". PJ has long black hair and tended to wear it down

around her face. She answered the questions in a short but direct manner almost as if

interviewing for a job. She would pause and think about her responses that best articulated her

thought processes. When asked to describe herself PJ replied, "Um I am laid back, fun, outgoing,

social, I guess how you say it". PJ had difficulty regularly attending school and on several

occasions would skip school. PJ found herself falling behind in her classes during her 11th grade

year and chose to attend the alternative school program to recover lost credits in order to

graduate on time. PJ finished all of her classes in February prior to the end of the school year and

three months ahead of the end of the semester. She plans on attending her graduation ceremony

in May and walking with her class. She moved into her first apartment on March 1st and works

at a factory. She plans to continue to work there until she is able to enroll in the CNA nursing

program offered by a local college.

Heather

Heather is 17 years old and in 10th grade at Eastside High School. She is a tall, lean, and

very attractive young lady. She was well dressed with the latest fashion trends. She had on large

hoop earrings that hung along her dark brown hair past the middle of her neck. She spoke in a

lethargic manner as if she really did not care. Heather has had multiple absences during her

academic career and is continuously trying to recover lost credits from failing her classes. When

asked how she would describe herself, she replied, "Outgoing careful of other people, um

caring". Heather was placed in the alternative middle school program in 8th grade and placed in

the alternative high school program in the 10th grade. Heather spent the last 6 months of her 10th

grade year in the alternative high school and returned to her regular high school the following

school year. She continues to have mixed feeling about the alternative school environment and

finds herself walking a thin line of being placed in alternative school once again due to her

disruptive and disrespectful outburst in the regular school setting. Heather is currently at the end

of her second 10th grade year and is trying to catch up on her credits so she does not fall further

behind in her education.

<div align="center">

Tavion

</div>

Tavion is 16 years of age and in 10th grade at Northside High School. Tavion has a

personality that is contagious with laughter. He can find humor in almost every aspect of life.

When asked how old are you? He replied, "Yea, I am 21 no I'm just playing I am 16 and I'm in

the 10th grade". When asked to describe himself, he replied, "I don't know I'm a whole lot of

stuff I mean I'm funny, obviously I look good because I pull all the bad girls and uh I have a

good sense of humor". Tavion has been placed once in middle school and once in high school in

the alternative school setting throughout his academic career and continues to try to stay out of

trouble but trouble seems to find him. Tavion is currently at the end of his 10th grade year and is

trying to catch up on his grades so he does not fall further behind in his education. He works full

time and enjoys making a paycheck and having gainful employment.

Brianna

Brianna is 15 years old and in the 10th grade at Northside High School. Brianna's story is very unique compared to the other participants in the study because she had only three discipline referral since entering school. She made good grades and tried her hardest to learn what she needed to know to pass her classes. When interviewed, she was very soft spoken and would answer the interview question with a one to two word response. When asked to describe herself she replied, "Um nice, quiet girl that tries to stay focused". Brianna is in 10th grade making good grades and staying out of trouble. She continues to work extra hard to pass her classes.

Analysis of Data

All word documents with transcriptions, narrative stories, and document analysis were uploaded into Atlas.ti 7, a qualitative data analysis software program. Atlas.ti 7 consolidated the data which allowed the researcher to keep track of all documents, annotations, and field notes in one safe location. The program also assisted the researcher in assigning codes to the various data collections uploaded in the program. After reading and rereading the documents in Atlas.ti 7, the themes began to emerge from the data that will be later discussed in this chapter. As the student narratives were analyzed similar quotes that addressed the research question were categorized into codes and themes. The codes then in turn emerged into four final themes: Identified as a Student Placed "At-risk", My Behavior Impacted my Education, Second Chance, and The End of the Story Can be Good. The themes, codes, and key words are presented in Figure 8.1.

Themes, Codes, and Key Words Chart

Themes	Codes	Key Words
Identified as a Student Placed "At-risk"	Response to Intervention Tiers, Academic Areas of Weakness, Placement in Special Education	Reading, Math, Help, Teacher Assistance, Small Group, Pull Out Services
My Behavior Impacted my Education	Middle School Behavior, High School Behavior, Alternative School Placement	Bad Influences, Suspension, Distractions in class, Failing Grades, Attendance
Second Chance	Alternative School Placement, Service Learning Project, Ability to Focus, Credit Recovery Alternative School, Graduation	Recognizing Behavior, Ability to Focus, Catching Up, Helping Others
The End of the Story Can be Good	Resilience, Future, Career Driven, Self-Awareness	Goals, Positive Outlook, Maturing, Overcoming Obstacles, Outside Responsibilities, Graduation

Figure 9.1

Identified as a Student Placed "At-risk"

Each story identified a pivotal point in the student's life which started in

elementary school when the student began to struggle academically and exhibit

behaviors. Perhaps the first three grades in elementary school were so significant because

that is the beginning stages of sight word identification and reading fluency for most

young children in the public school system. In second grade students are required to have

attained basic reading and comprehension skills, along with, basic math skills and by

third grade, students need to be reading grade level passages independently in order to

comprehend the text. The National Reading Panel recommended that reading instruction

in the early grades focus on: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, reading

comprehension, and vocabulary (Balu, Zhu, Doolittle, Schiller, Jenkins, Gersten, 2015).

There are certainly examples of academic problems in the later years of elementary

school but first grade and second grade were critical academic points in most of the students' stories.

While reviewing John's school records he was a different case then the other participants because he was placed "at-risk" in kindergarten and placed in special education services under the Significant Development Delay (SDD) category but later was referred for further testing in the first grade. While reviewing PJ and Tavion's individual school records the researcher found that both students were placed "at-risk" and began receiving instructional interventions on the Response to Intervention Model in first grade due to areas of weakness in basic reading, reading fluency, and written expression. Brianna was identified as a student placed "at-risk" in the third grade and began receiving academic interventions in the area of reading, math, and written expression. After being identified as a student placed at-risk, the school began implementing specific interventions in the classroom to assist the students in their deficit areas. Typical of most of the students' stories John's account of reading being the hardest subject for him to learn in elementary school and the implementation of various interventions put in place to assist in the deficit area is described here:

> The hardest for me was probably reading. I had individual reading
>
> class like there were like three or four people and like 6 groups and
>
> everyone would just take turns reading and we would help each
>
> other out and sound the words out and stuff.

Reading became a significant academic deficit area for PJ in second grade and the school began pulling her out of the regular education classroom environment to provide

additional instruction in a smaller group environment to increase her reading skills. PJ

recalled:

> Now in second grade, reading was probably harder for me.
>
> Everything was always read to me. I was pulled out from class for
>
> reading and vocabulary words. They broke everything down like
>
> into simple forms.

Brianna began to struggle in the second grade due to the content becoming more

difficult. Just as PJ had recalled Brianna remembered being pulled out of her regular

education classroom for additional academic support. Brianna was identified as a student

placed "at-risk" in the 3rd grade and referred for Tier 3 interventions in the Response to

Intervention Model due to areas of weakness in reading, math, and written expression.

Brianna explained:

> In 2nd grade some stuff was hard like Math and Science. The
>
> teachers sat down with me sometimes and helped me to understand
>
> it. I remember being pulled out in some grades in elementary
>
> school. 3rd grade was hard um starting classes like social studies.
>
> The work was hard. In elementary school there was a teacher
>
> named Ms. Black, we worked on like phonics or something I
>
> remember having cards with words and reading them and stuff.

Tavion always remembered reading being the most difficult subject for him in

elementary school. He did not remember the exact grade that he began to struggle in

reading but always found it to be an area of weakness for him in school. Tavion

explained:

Reading oh know, well we read like in text books, we use to do

this little thing called popcorn tag you it or something like that or

as my teacher called it duck, duck, goose or something like that. It

was like it was fun to read with a lot of people then just to read by

yourself, it's boring. Third grade I can't remember cause all my

teachers helped me in my classes.

Four of the students received instructional interventions as soon as they were identified as

students placed "at-risk". Throughout John's first grade year he received individual one on

one instruction, as well as, small group instruction to assist in reading. PJ received

instructional interventions from first grade to third grade such as, flash cards, manipulative

for math, reduction of spelling list, small group work for reading, and was placed in the Early

Intervention Program for reading and math. Brianna received instructional academic

interventions such as reteach, informal read aloud, teacher assistant for assistance with

reading, informal collaboration, meet with a specialist in small group, Early Intervention

Program for reading and math until fourth grade. Tavion received instructional academic

interventions from the first grade until he entered into the fifth grade such as flex reading

groups, after school tutoring, one on one tutoring, and Early Intervention Program for

reading. PJ, Brianna, and Tavion were all placed in Early Intervention Programs which are

designed to serve students who are placed "at-risk". The Early Intervention Program provides

additional instructional resources to help students obtain the necessary academic skills to

reach grade level performance in the shortest possible time (Georgia Department of

Education, 2015). All of the students were unresponsive to RTI interventions put in place in

the regular educational setting and were in need of more intensive instruction, which was special education services (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010).

John, PJ, Brianna, and Tavion were all evaluated and found eligible to receive special education services. John was found eligible for special education services in kindergarten for SDD and then reevaluated in second grade and found eligible for Other Health Impairment (OHI) and Speech. John discussed getting into trouble a lot in elementary school and not being able to focus like other kids. John later was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) which impeded his ability to focus in the regular education setting. He recalled being put on medication to help him focus in the classroom.

> They had put me on uh Concerta to help me focus. When I didn't take it
> had me hyper and when I did take it had me focused and settled down.
> Hush up and not talk to nobody. I be doing my work.

PJ continued to struggle in the area of reading and was found eligible for special education services under the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) category in the third grade. Brianna was also found eligible for special education services under the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) category for reading and math in the fourth grade. Tavion unlike PJ and Brianna received RTI interventions for four years before being found eligible for special education services in the fifth grade under the Specific Learning Disability (SLD) category for reading weaknesses. All three individuals struggled in the area of reading and were identified with a Specific Learning Disability in that area.

Heather had a unique story because she did not struggle academically but exhibited behavioral concerns in the school setting. She was not referred for RTI intervention during her elementary school years but began to have difficulty in middle school. Heather's guardian

requested that Heather be tested for special education services due to concerns about short

attention span, oppositional behaviors, and difficulty controlling her anger. Heather qualified for

special education services in the eighth grade under the Other Health Impairment (OHI)

eligibility category. Heather recalled:

> I was good in 6th grade. I started getting in trouble in 7th grade for
>
> little stuff, probably the people that I was around.

Other issues arose during the elementary school years for John, PJ and Tavion regarding

behavior. John recalled getting in trouble a lot for trying to be the class clown and always trying

to get everyone in the class to laugh at him. PJ remembered always getting into trouble for

talking to much in class and having to move her behavior clip to a lower level on the behavior

chart as a consequence. Tavion never really got into trouble at school but recollected always

getting in trouble on the school bus. Tavion like John was diagnosed with Attention

Hyperactivity Disorder while he was in elementary school. Tavion recalled:

> Back then I was like uh in elementary I wasn't staying focused and
>
> stuff like that like regular kids. You know like kids that young
>
> don't stay focused a lot and yea it just be the classes, it don't be the
>
> classes, it be the people in the classes.

All participants noted particular consequences for their behavior and used the word "a

lot" to describe the number of behavioral incidents. They knew and understood that that their

behavior posed an obstacle that they needed to overcome in order to be more successful in their

educational endeavors. As a result, through their own experiences, each participant realized that

their behavior had an impact on their educational experiences.

My Behavior Impacted my Education

Each story identified a critical turning point in an increase in behavior during the middle school years. John recalled:

> In middle school I was always in trouble. I'm going to say the most
>
> trouble I got into was in 7th or 8th grade.

PJ discussed continually getting in trouble in sixth grade for talking in the class and being redirected by the teacher and sent to In School Suspension (ISS). PJ recalled:

> My 6th grade year it was fun. I got in trouble a lot for talking. I just
>
> like talking so um I got in trouble a lot so I went to ISS a lot for
>
> talking. It was like hush or we going to send you out the room, we
>
> going to send you out the room. I just couldn't help myself. I just
>
> like to talk.

Heather recalled:

> I started getting in trouble in 7th grade for little stuff, probably the
>
> people that I was around.

Tavion recollected:

> In 7th grade that was when I was getting into trouble. I would have
>
> lunch detention and things like that. Ok it was some students in the
>
> class breaking crayons and throwing them and stuff like that and
>
> that year was the year when I failed the 7th grade cause I was
>
> playing too much and got kept behind.

Heather and Tavion exhibited behaviors in eight grade that required them to be placed in the alternative middle school program. Heather stated:

8th grade I had a lot of referrals and I think that's when I had got

sent to the alternative middle school for just being talkative.

Heather was sent to alternative middle school when she was in the eighth grade under the zero tolerance policy act because she had forged her guardian's signature on a school related document. She was placed at the alternative middle school for the last six months of her eight grade school year. Tavion also attended the alternative middle school program during his eight grade year for a zero tolerance policy violation for gang related activity. Tavion recalled:

8th grade was the year that I had gotten into trouble. I didn't really

get into any trouble till like I did like with middle school

alternative school. Alright the reason why we got in trouble was

we had this little click as you want to call it and we was taking

pictures of ourselves with our flag and stuff like that. VRG it was

Velview Road Gang but I didn't bring that up it was Jeremy that

made that up and so that's when I got in trouble and then I trying

to see if it was the next day or a couple days after we got in trouble

cause that's how we got caught.

Tavion did not post the gang related picture on social media but soon realized that by being an individual in the photograph caused him to receive the consequences in the school environment. He recalled:

Temptation and all that media stuff, media and all that. Social

media you know. I mean you can't hide nothing I mean you try and

they still find it like the uh the gang relation stuff.

Tavion was placed at the alternative middle school for one 9 week session and

returned to his base school to complete his eight grade school year. Tavion discussed

during the interview that he was glad that he had gotten in trouble because he felt that if

he had not gotten in trouble during his eight grade year and sent to the alternative middle

school he might still be involved in gang related activity right now.

As the school years progressed the students described an increase in behavioral

challenges that followed them into their high school years. John recalled:

> Well, 10th grade I use to try to be the class clown um cussing at the
>
> teachers and just doing stuff just to do it. When we be going to
>
> school I be like I'm not doing nothing today so I just go in the
>
> class and put my head down and go to sleep and not do no work or
>
> some teachers would just write me or send me down to the front
>
> office cause I wasn't doing my work.

John's behavior did not only affect him but his behavior impacted other

students he was in class with. John explained:

> I kept talking back and disrupting the class and keeping other
>
> students from doing their work. When they ask me to get quiet, I
>
> told them no and I kept talking back and disrupting the class and
>
> keeping other students from doing their work. When I was telling
>
> them jokes and the teacher just be like, just stop talking because
>
> you are distracting and I just kept on doing it.

John began to see a change in his grades as discussed here:

Not staying up in class, not doing none of my work, and my grades

were just dropping. They were just giving me 0's in the classroom.

The more trouble I get in the more I was out of school and the

more I was failing. My 10th grade year and my 11th grade year that

is when I well my 11th grade that's when I started falling down and

failing all of my classes.

The further John fell behind in his grades the more he began giving up on

school altogether. John recalled:

When I was at the base school my brain, I was just giving up, like

I was giving up on school and I was doing nothing except going to

the classroom and putting my head down and just sleep like I

didn't do no kind of work. Then I just started failing and I got into

more kinda trouble so they started sending me home.

Over the years before entering the alternative school, John received 54 office

referrals for disruption on school bus, disrespect to staff, hitting, fighting, excessive

distraction, sexually inappropriate behavior, simple assault, refusal to follow directions,

class disruption, and excessive talking. As the grades progressed so did the In School

Suspensions and Out of School Suspensions. John received 17 In School Suspensions, 9

Bus Suspensions, and 16 Out of School Suspensions.

PJ displayed minimal disruptive classroom behaviors over the years. She had

received 13 office referrals in school one for fighting, one for name calling, a few for

disrespect to staff, and some for class disruption. PJ had only 7 In School Suspensions

and 0 Out of School Suspensions. PJ's new sense of freedom and independence when

she entered high school affected her attendance at school. PJ began failing almost all of her classes in the beginning of her eleventh grade school year as PJ recalled:

> I was excited to go to high school it is way different from middle
> school. I wanted to have fun, I just wanted to have fun. I really
> wasn't concerned about school and stuff. I would just party with
> people my age.

PJ began to fall further behind in her academics in the 11th grade because the academic content became much more difficult for her to understand because she irregularly attended her classes. She knew that her attendance had the greatest impact on her failing most of her classes. PJ explained here:

> My 11th grade that is when I began to struggle with the math cause
> it gets real, real complicated. The thing is with the attendance they
> um take off like 2 points everyday if you miss or if you are late to
> class and my grandma had bought me a car a couple of months
> after I had turned 16 so I think right there was like a big, big, big
> distraction. I probably missed two days out the week and the rest
> of the days I be late. That year I failed, one, two, three. Three
> classes. I was talking or asleep or didn't pay attention. I was an
> outgoing student, a good student that didn't want to come to
> school.

John and PJ both found themselves failing their classes and falling further behind in their academics in their 11th grade of high school which required them to seek placement in the alternative school setting and take credit recovery courses.

Heather recalled that high school was very different from middle school and that the behavioral expectations increased when she entered high school. Heather found that it was not her behavior that affected other students like John but that other students impacted her behavior in the classroom.

> High school it was different like the classes and the people. The
>
> teachers are more strict. They expected more than the middle
>
> school did like academically and more assignments. 9th grade first
>
> semester I was doing alright and then towards the middle of the
>
> school year there was a whole lot of trouble from being with the
>
> wrong people.

Heather was very adamant that the reason why she got into trouble in the classroom was due to the other students that she attended class with. Heather recalls:

> I was bad in 9th grade but I never got sent to alternative school but
>
> I was close. Usually the teachers would send me out of class and
>
> then come over there and talk to me or just tell me to be quiet. I
>
> use to be just bad in 9th grade just like talk back and stuff like that.
>
> I think it was just the people that were around me and how I
>
> interacted with them, me just being social. I either got sent out of
>
> the class or sent to ISS or wrote up.

Heather did recall that her behavior in the classroom did have consequences attached to her actions. Heather had not been placed in the alternative high school setting in ninth grade but her behavior record did follow her into tenth grade. Over the years,

Heather received 58 office referrals before going to the alternative school for class

disruption, defiant behavior, talking back, aggressive behavior, walking out of class,

disorderly conduct, tardies, skipping class, false information, profanity, and fighting.

Heather had 28 In School Suspensions, 1 bus suspension, and 10 Out of School

Suspensions. Heather was placed in the alternative school setting for fighting during her

10th grade school year. Heather recollected:

> Well, I'm going to say 10th grade, last year was the worst. I wasn't
>
> as bad but I was ok. I mean I was doing bad things so I guess I had
>
> consequences for talking back to the teacher, fussing stuff like that.
>
> I got suspended for it and I was supposed to get suspended for
>
> three days but I was supposed to come back on the second day but
>
> that's when the administrators called and said you got a meeting at
>
> the alternative school. I wasn't proud of myself.

Heather could not recall the specific incident that had her placed in the

alternative high school and was under the impression that it was an accumulation

of behavioral referrals in her educational records that had gotten her in trouble.

Heather explains:

> I think I had got in some type of trouble and I think they looked at
>
> my back ground so I think it was a lot of referrals and discipline
>
> and that all. My referrals for disruption of class, stuff like that. I
>
> can be loud sometimes.

Heather was suspended for fighting with another student on the school campus

which is a zero tolerance policy violation which is why she had a meeting at the

alternative high school but because she had an extensive record of disruptive behavior in the school environment she was placed in the alternative high school for the remainder of her tenth grade school year.

Tavion like Heather and John had an extensive behavioral record over the course of his school years, Tavion received 53 office referrals in school for class disruption, bullying, hitting, kicking, fighting, refusing to follow directions, inappropriate classroom behavior, profanity, throwing things, and disrespect to staff. Tavion had 22 In School Suspensions, 34 bus suspensions, and 7 Out of School Suspensions. Tavion was finding success during his ninth grade school year. He began playing high school football and keeping his grades up and staying out of trouble but the good times soon ended for Tavion when he found himself with the wrong people at the wrong time. Tavion recalls the day he got in trouble and was placed in the alternative high school setting.

> Well I got in high school alternative school, it was me Donte what his name Jarone and we was uh waiting on his momma was going to come pick us up. We had just gotten done lifting weights and stuff. We had went to the old gym because it was cold outside and we just wasn't going to sit outside because it was cold outside. Then he went to the wrestling locker room and came out with a phone and like he gave me the case and I was like I don't need that case I got two phones and anyway it would never fit my case not my phone.

Tavion knew that the actions of his friend may be attached to a

consequence and felt like he did not deserve to get in trouble for something he did

not personal take out of the gym. Tavion recollected:

> So he did that and I was like you just better not get me in trouble
>
> and so it end up the next day I got called to the office and they was
>
> like you got something you got to tell me and I was like I don't
>
> know what you talking about and they said you Donte and Jarone
>
> had stolen a phone and I got it on camera.

Tavion was placed in the alternative high school setting for the last six

months of his ninth grade school year for breaking the zero tolerance policy of theft. Just

like Heather, Tavion remembers going to the alternative school placement meeting and

during the meeting the administrators discussed the fact that he had been to the

alternative middle school and that he had a lot of behavior referrals in his school record.

Brianna like Tavion had been doing well behaviorally and academically during

the first half of her ninth grade school year. One day changed everything for Brianna and

where she would be receiving her education for the next six months. Brianna discussed

the day she got in trouble and was sent to alternative high school.

> It was near the end of 9th grade. It was before school had started.
>
> One morning I had just got off the bus and I always meet up with
>
> my boyfriend and uh and we had like we walked around school
>
> like everyone does and like we went to a corner inside the building
>
> and I had performed oral sex on him. I remember me standing
>
> there and me seeing the assistant principal walk down and talk to

us and go to some office, her office. She talked to us and then

asked for our parent's numbers to call them to let them know what

happened. Then I remember getting in the car with the police

officers.

As Brianna recalled the incidents of the day when she had gotten into

trouble at school, tears began to fill up in her eyes. The researcher asked Brianna

several times if she wanted to stop talking about the incident and Brianna said she

was fine. Brianna continued to tell her story:

Um I remember the police officer that I got in the car with he told

me to just tell the truth and don't lie. I felt really bad. I was crying

afterwards. I went to, I think it was the jailhouse downtown and we

got out and went inside with the one police officer and we waited

for our parents to come and when my mom got there we both went

into a room with a person that was there that worked there and we

talked about the situation. I was going to get into trouble and not

being at my regular school anymore.

This was the first time Brianna had ever gotten into trouble at school. Over

the last nine years of school Brianna had only received two office referrals; one of

the referrals was for witting on the back of the school bus seat with a marker. She

had never been suspended from school until that day. Brianna recalled:

It was the first time I had been suspended. We had talked to this

man that was there and after that the man told us we were going to

the alternative high school.

Brianna was placed at the alternative high school for the last six months of her ninth grade school year for violating the zero tolerance policy rules for inappropriate physical contact on a school campus. All of the students exhibited behaviors that were unacceptable in the school environment but continued to focus on the future of their academics. When the students were placed in the alternative school environment they soon began to realize that they were given a second chance to obtain an education.

Second Chance

The most frequently used code fell into the theme identified as second chance. The word "focus" was used when the individuals' referred to the class size in the alternative school environment, such as "I'm focused on my work" or "I can focus". Also included were "smaller class" and "somewhere small", when used in the same context. Also incorporated in this theme was "catch up on your credits" when the participants discussed the alternative school environment. It was noted that the small class size and smaller environment provided an easier yet more flexible educational environment for some of the students to become successful in, as well as, build relationships with teachers. John recalled:

> They suggested to send me here (alternative school) like to get
>
> caught up and catch up or whatever. I wanted to come to
>
> alternative school because I was failing in the public school and I
>
> was getting distracted in class and wasn't doing my work and
>
> stayed getting in trouble. So me and my mommy agreed to come to
>
> here (alternative school) and see how I do in school and be in
>
> smaller classes and see if I can focus better.

John described how the smaller class environment impacted his education.

> Being in a smaller class with like 3 or 4 other kids and not having
>
> my phone out bringing some stuff to class or school and being
>
> more well having more lead way of doing stuff. By you being in
>
> that smaller classroom you can focus better and you are able to get
>
> more work done like you are supposed to but that is just for me
>
> how I feel because being in a smaller classroom helps me to focus
>
> better and do my work.

When John was at the base school he found himself four to five credits behind what he needed to have in the eleventh grade. He soon realized that he needed his education and that it was time to catch up on his credits and do his work in order to graduate on time. John discussed:

> Uh everything got better like I stopped getting into trouble, I
>
> started focusing more, doing my work and passing my classes. It
>
> took me the semester of my 11th grade year and now I am all
>
> caught up. I feel great. I feel good about it. I will graduate in May.
>
> I'll be the second person in my whole family to graduate from
>
> school.

If John had not attended the alternative high school program he discussed what educational options might have looked like for him.

> If I go back right now I know for a fact that I won't be going to
>
> school and I won't be focused and I get distracted easily. They
>
> give us a lot of work and when I was at the base school and just the

classroom gets to be so full like 20 to 25 that sometimes there be

like one teacher and everybody needs help on something and it's

like she can't come around or he can't come around and help

everybody because he was trying to help other people. I think I

probably still be failing at the base school.

PJ's story was very similar to John's since alternative school allowed her to catch

up on failed credits. PJ recalls:

I made World History up here (alternative school) and I made

Physical Science up here at alternative school. I got ahead, I liked

that. Oh yes it is working for me because I want to graduate but

some people they just need a boost. I think alternative school is

more of a laid back situation then the base school. It was at your

own pace. It is a smaller environment.

The smaller environment allowed PJ to develop a positive relationship with one

teacher's in the alternative school setting that give her the encouragement to continue her

education even when times became difficult. PJ recalls:

Well my favorite teacher here was Mrs. Green. She was like cool.

Like I guess she is not going to sugar coat anything. Her class was

relaxed. Some days I wanted to quit school because the class I did

before, I just wanted to quit. She um she told me to walk with her

and she talked with me about how far along I had done came.

PJ was able to make up her failed credits in five months and found herself back on track to graduate on time with her class. If PJ had not attended the alternative high school program she discussed what her educational options might have looked like.

> I was behind on my credits, probably 4 credits and I wasn't going
> to school so they gave me the alternative of coming here or not
> graduating on time at my base school. I probably graduated class
> of 17 or 18. I know I would have gotten back in school eventually
> but I would have been 20 or 21 when I graduated.

Heather agreed with John that it was better for her to be in a smaller school setting because she was able to focus more on her classes. Heather stated:

> I think it is better for me to be somewhere small then big. I'm
> better in small places yea I see I did better over there then at the
> base school. I can focus, um to stay focused and do what I needed
> to do. I needed to do my work and focus because I was failing one
> or two classes.

Heather was in the tenth grade when she was placed at the alternative school but found herself in the similar situation of having to catch up on failed classes. Heather recalls:

> When I was at alternative school and I caught up there. I passed
> my classes because they were easier. It wasn't as much
> assignments as it is at the base school.

The smaller environment also allowed Heather to develop a positive relationship with one teacher's in the alternative school. Heather pointed out:

> There was this one teacher but I forgot her name. She helped me
>
> um she helped like she was there out of all the other teachers she
>
> was just there and she seemed like she cared and she talked to me.

Heather returned to her base school and had to repeat her 10th grade school year. She continues to struggle to catch up on the classes that she has failed but if she had not attended alternative school during the last semester of her previous tenth grade school year she would be further behind in her credits. She was able to catch up on some of her lost credits and pass three of her core classes for tenth grade while attending the alternative school program.

Although the alternative school provided John, PJ, and Heather an opportunity to catch up on their failed courses, the elective courses at the alternative school were limited and did not provide the students with college or career path prospects. PJ discussed:

> Sometimes like now like this semester I wish I had gone back
>
> because I would have took the nurse aid course. I would have been
>
> CNA certified. I want to stay but um with the nurse course it is
>
> called a dual enrollment which you're still a high school student
>
> but you're a college student also so once you finish that if you go
>
> to a 4 year university you will be a sophomore instead of a
>
> freshman.

When a student is enrolled in the alternative school program they are not allowed to go on any traditional school's campus which includes any schools that offer college and career path courses.

Not all of the participant's preferred the small group environment at the alternative school and referred to the environment as a prison like atmosphere. Brianna recalled:

> Like jail nothing like regular school. Like a group of kids in one
>
> class separated. We would have to take off our jacket and then
>
> shoes and belts for them to wand us down to see if we had
>
> anything. We would go to our classes. It wasn't going to be like
>
> regular school. We had separate classes and ate at different times
>
> and things like a small amount of people in the cafeteria. There
>
> were six or seven kids in the class. They had different courses.

Tavion agreed with Brianna that alternative school has a limited number of students compared to the base school. Tavion pointed out:

> I mean it was better than not going to school you know but at the
>
> same time it was like going to school and going to jail but not in
>
> handcuffs. It is very small and you can't do anything you really
>
> can't do anything.

The smaller environment allowed Tavion to develop positive relationships with some of the teachers and the principal in the alternative school. Tavion discussed the principal of the alternative school attending one of his high school football games after he had returned back to his base school. Tavion recalled:

> The principal he was always cool with me. He would be like what
>
> up big man and uh and when you get back I want you to be playing
>
> football and I'm going to come see you. Yea he came to see me.

Yea he was right there when we was walking down you know the

bell out there he was right there. He shook my hand and all that.

Alternative school allowed Tavion and Brianna to recognize that decisions they

had made at their base school impacted their education and that they learned a valuable

lesson that they want to be at school to learn and not get into trouble. Brianna explained:

I should not have done that and it was very wrong to do. I felt like

that wasn't what I was supposed to do. I feel like I shouldn't have

ever done that and I trying to learn in school. Well like not having

that in my mind to not do that anymore. Like coming back to the

base school I remembered what I did and I just have to remember

not to do that anymore.

Tavion explained:

I learned how to leave some stuff alone and like you know I just

learned from my mistake. I just got to be around the right people.

Because alternative school is a smaller educational setting it allows students to

participate in activities that they may not have been exposed to in the lager traditional

school setting. John, PJ, Heather, Brianna, and Tavion were all exposed to a service

learning project while in the alternative school setting. The service learning project was

focused on helping individuals in Uganda. The students in the alternative school learned

about a devastating parasite found in the region that infected the feet of children because

the children did not have shoes to protect against the parasite. The students at the

alternative school began making shoes out of materials that their parents or they donated

to the school and sent the shoes to the children of Uganda. This experience for several of

the students had a lasting effect on how they were able to help other individuals in need.

PJ explained:

> Well we watched a video about the people in Uganda about the
> issues with the parasites. I think they are called parasites. They
> called classes in to watch the video on the foundation so I think
> pretty much everyone in the school saw it. It was volunteer work
> they didn't make you do it if you wanted to you could. The name
> of the bug is called jiggers so what the jigger does is the children
> of Uganda they don't have any shoes and they walk around and run
> around and they dig in their feet and it is really, really, painful to
> walk on and then stuff like that.

As PJ spoke the researcher observed that the service learning project

evoked PJ's care and compassion for other individuals that do not have as many

resources. PJ recalled:

> It made me feel like I had it easy like my life was easy compared
> to them um like I have everything I wanted and they didn't even
> have shoes to put on their feet and I have 20 pairs of shoes to put
> on my feet so it made me really look to see how much I really
> have. It made me value more of what I have. Everybody needs
> something at one point in time.

Heather recalled her experience with the service learning project.

> It was at the alternative school and basically it was helping the
> children in Africa. Well, not just the children but also the adults

that didn't have shoes. It is kids and adults in need of shoes and we

helped them.

During the interview as Heather spoke about the service learning project

her facial expression went from a very flat non emotional expression to a smile as

she explained how she had helped other individuals that needed something that

she has never had to do without. Heather explained:

> They need more stuff then we do. We have clothes, we have shoes,
>
> we don't drink out of pans and ah bottles will like those jug bottles.
>
> We have a house, we have food and they don't. It was sad and we
>
> needed to help more. I learned to be thankful for what you got
>
> cause they don't have anything and not to judge off of what you
>
> see. Just to help out like show that I cared. It showed me to be
>
> more thankful for what I got because just be thankful.

John recalled the service learning project opening his eyes to helping others around us.

> Somewhat it just opened my eyes to try to help other people just
>
> because they might be far away from me that just doesn't mean
>
> they don't need help. What I felt about it is knowing that I am
>
> helping other kids and stuff like that.

Tavion and Brianna were also exposed to the service learning project but not to

the extent that PJ, John, and Heather were but they did experienced very similar reactions

of wanting to help other individuals in need.

PJ and John were both in the eleventh grade when they began struggling in school

and failing their classes, so they decided to attend the alternative school program in hopes

of recovering their lost credits in order to graduate on time. Both John and PJ are

scheduled to graduate this school year and have completed all of the required credit

hours. Tavion, Brianna, and Heather all returned to their base schools after attending the

alternative school program last year. They have not violated any zero tolerance policies

this school year and have remained at their base schools. Each of the students have been

given a second chance at following the school rules, catching up on failed classes, and

making better academic decisions to stay on track to graduate from high school.

The End of the Story Can be Good

Almost all of the students in this study had dreams and aspirations of being

successful, graduating from high school, being independent, and obtaining a career after

graduating high school. The participants explained what they needed to reach their goals

and how they intended to overcome present obstacles in order to achieve their dreams in

the future. Each of the students' responses aligned with developmental characteristics of

resilience. Resiliency can be seen in individual's social competence, problem solving

skills, autonomy, and sense of purpose and future (Benard, 1993). John saw a need for

purpose in his life.

> My plans for my future is going to the navy and doing something
>
> with my life instead of being out here on the streets and not doing
>
> nothing, so I can give to my little daughter and take care of her and
>
> show her from right and wrong.

In order for John to achieve his goals he recognized that he need to stay focused,

keep pushing, and not let anything distract him from his dreams. He also stated that his

biggest influences in his life and what keeps him motivated to be successful are his

mother, father, and his little girl. His mother always told him that if you put your mind to

it you can do it. Even after becoming a father at the age of 17, John finds that his little

girl keeps him focused because he knows that she needs to be taken care of and that he

must stay focused in order to get her what she needs. John has a definition of what

success is for him.

> I define success as you accomplish what you said you was going to
>
> accomplish or your goal that you said you were going to do. I am
>
> going to do it and when I'm going to do it and how it is going to
>
> affect me and my family and when I finish school and I will have
>
> to be in the real world and I got to do what I got to do. What I need
>
> most to reach my goals is my mother so she can keep me focused
>
> and have my confidence up so I can move to the navy.

Tavion's story is very similar John's story because they both know that in order to

reach their goals they must stay focused and make their family member proud of their

accomplishments. Tavion explained:

> I make promises, I made a promise to my grandmother that I was
>
> going to finish school and I was going to make her proud. I made
>
> a promise to my girlfriend because she is going somewhere and I
>
> want to be right there with her when she goes somewhere. I'm
>
> going to get my little apartment for a couple months and then I'm
>
> going to go to college and then I'm going to I got to do what I got
>
> to do. I got to make it up outta here.

Tavion recognized that in order to be successful nothing can keep him from doing what he wants to do because he has created a plan to accomplish his goals.

> My number 1 goal is to finish up school first. That's the first thing.
>
> After I finish college and all that have some kids and take care of
>
> my kids, get old, watch my kids grow up and then get old. Then
>
> live an old life. My goals are to finish school and save up more
>
> money than I have and like be the best I can be in life. I plan to
>
> reach my goals just one step at a time.

Tavion would like to go to a technical college and pursue a degree in engineering as a mechanical engineer or a designer or a housing engineer. He is also interested in going to college to become a welder. Tavion definition of success is:

> Most important to me is like having a good job if you don't have a
>
> good job you want be successful I mean you can be successful but
>
> you not going to be successful in a good way.

Tavion feels that the one thing he needs in order to accomplish his goals is encouragement. His biggest influences in his life are his grandmother, his dad, the rest of his family because they are always getting on to him about being good, staying on track, and staying focused in school.

PJ has her plan all laid out as well and the steps that she needs to take in order to accomplish her goal of one day being a registered nurse. PJ explained:

> I plan to finish high school by the end of February and um
>
> currently I am working, I work a full time job and I will continue
>
> to work and I am moving into my own apartment March the 1st and

um I um I plan on starting the nurse class over in August. I will be

certified as a CNA.

PJ has recognized the importance of having a career versus just having a job. She

knows that in order to attain a good standing career she must be able to accomplish

anything that she puts her mind to, stay focused in order to stand on her own two feet.

Her goals include:

My goals are to pursue my RN career and um have good credit and

um to pay off my car and to be more uh to grow and to grow and

become a better person. Being in a career is the most important to

me, being able to take care of myself and standing on my own two

feet. Being motivated and being focused, being honest, and striving

for nothing but the best is how I can reach my goals.

PJ like Tavion feels that her grandma and her grandparent's on her father's side of

the family have been her biggest influences in her life. PJ noted:

My grandma and my grandparents on my dad's side have

influenced me because they push me and they want to see me do

better then what my parents did and what they did.

PJ feels that in order to reach her goals she needs motivation.

Like John, Heather has a desire to go into the military. Heather is also aware that she

must stay focused in order to graduate and accomplish her goals. Heather explained:

I was thinking about going into the air force and I have taken the

ASVAB before I went to alternative school. I was thinking about

being an ultra sound tech.

Since Heather is currently struggling in school and not passing her classes she has devised a plan in order to achieve her goal of graduating high school and pursuing a career in the military. Heather stated:

> I was going to go to the Learning Center. It's over by the Career
>
> School, its where you take your classes on the computer, it's like
>
> whatever classes you missed you can catch up on them so you can
>
> graduate on time.

In order to overcome any obstacles that get in the way of her reaching her goals she knows she must stay focused. When Heather thought about her future she wants to make her family proud that she was able to accomplish her goals. Heather also feels that she needs to be around positive people so they can help her to do better and be all that she can be.

Brianna dreams of one day being a pediatrician because she wants to help little children. Brianna feels the need to stay positive so she can reach her goals. Brianna explained:

> I think about the positive and doing a whole lot better and not
>
> doing anything bad. I dream of becoming a pediatrician doctor and
>
> staying positive. I like children and taking care of children. My old
>
> doctor he was very nice and like I always use to say that I wanted
>
> to be like him.

She has considered going to the Career School located in town but is not familiar if they offer the classes she needs to pursue her goal of becoming a doctor. Brianna does recognize that she needs to talk with individuals at her high school to find out more information about college. Brianna stated:

Mrs. Knight can talk to me about it.

Brianna knows that in order to reach her goals she must stay focused and that she will not reach her goals if she does not stay on track by doing anything wrong. She sees that she needs to make good grades and a have focused mind so she can learn everything and graduate on time. The biggest influence she has in her life is her mother and her aunt because they help her do good in school. All of the participants exhibited characteristics of resiliency in the face of multiple obstacles that they encountered during their educational experience.

Summary

This study examined, documented, and analyzed the educational experiences of five African American students with disabilities before, during, and after attending alternative school. Using the Dis/ability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) as the theoretical framework, the researcher utilized a two-step analysis process. The first analysis of results drew upon the student's educational records to identify the past educational and behavioral experiences of the participants to answer the question: How are students identified "at-risk" for academic and behavioral concerns in the public school system? The second analysis of the results were guided by the student's narrative stories to answer the following research questions: What behavioral and academic factors influence placement of African American students with disabilities in the alternative school setting and how do students placed "at-risk" enhance characteristics of resiliency in the alternative school setting?

Results suggest that factors such as being identified as a student with a disability, disciplinary consequences, and placement in the alternative school setting have a direct

impact on the participant's educational experiences. There were differences and similarities in each of the students' stories. Tavion, Brianna, and PJ all struggled in the area of reading during the first three years of their educational experience and were all later identified as a student with a Specific Learning Disability. John, Heather, and Tavion all had extensive behavioral issues in the classroom prior to being placed in the alternative school and there were no records of any specific behavioral interventions being put in place during the students elementary or middle school years. Several of the students noted characteristic of resiliency in their narrative stories especially how alternative school provided them an opportunity to get back on track and realize that their behavior did affect their education. Another key component of resiliency is when students began to understand the importance of their education and the need to graduate on time so they may pursue higher education, military, or obtain a career versus just a job.

In Chapter 5, a discussion of the findings was presented based on the results. The implications were discussed in regards to educational practice, policy, and future research for this study. A conclusion was included that addressed the various stages of educational experiences and how each stage impacted the student's life.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The final chapter provides a discussion of the previous chapters, the summary of findings

developed from the results, implications of this research study, and conclusion. The discussion

reviews the problem, methodology, theoretical framework, and the findings of this study. The

implications section of this study included implications for educators in the school system,

higher education teacher preparation programs, school and district staff, state-wide

policymakers, and future research for this study. Lastly, the conclusion presents how the

student's educational experiences expanded the literary works of African American students with

disabilities in the alternative school setting and how the students displayed characteristics of

resiliency in the face of adversity.

Discussion

Overview of the Problem

Currently the national graduation rate is at the highest percentage that it has been in

twenty years. This indicates that nearly 4 out of 5 students receive a regular high school diploma

within 4 years of starting 9th grade for the first time (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

There continues to be a discrepancy in how to support the students who are identified as "at-

risk" of academic failure and potentially dropping of school in the educational setting. Student

risk factors include living in poverty, membership in a minority race or ethnic group, those who

exhibited academic, behavioral, or attitudinal problems that led to school dropout (Vesely,

2013). The 2011-2012 national data reports show that 31% of African American and 39% of

students with disabilities did not graduate and are among the highest populations of students

dropping out of school. Considerably fewer than 32% of African American students with

disabilities graduated high school with a standard diploma (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Schools now have a systematic approach to identify students placed "at-risk" at the beginning of the child's academic career. After nine years of implementing RTI in the school systems some students are not responding to the behavioral interventions that have been put in place. Teachers use more punitive approaches when disciplining culturally diverse students in the classroom based on the disproportionate disciplinary actions like suspension from the school environment (Cartledge, & Kourea, 2008). African American students are more likely to be suspended from school due to disciplinary school policies (Gay, 2010). These findings support the harsh social and economic realities for African American students in public school (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

This study analyzed and described five African American students' educational experiences from elementary school, middle school, high school, alternative school placement, and how they foresaw their futures after high school. The overarching questions that guided this study are: What are the educational experience of African American students with disabilities before, during, and after attending alternative school? The specific questions this research explored in order to answer the larger question were:

1. How are students identified as students placed "at-risk" for academic and behavioral areas of weakness in the public school system?

2. What academic and behavioral factors influence placement of African American students with disabilities in the alternative school setting?

3. How do students placed "at-risk" enhance characteristics of resiliency in the alternative school setting?

Methodology

This was a narrative case study design, utilizing one alternative school setting with five African American students with disabilities. This qualitative study applied document analysis, individual initial interviews, one focus group interview with two participants, audio visual reflective journaling, and individual follow up interviews for data collection. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously as the data collection was gathered in order for the researcher to develop narrative inquiries depicting the student chronological educational experiences.

Theoretical Framework

In an effort to answer the research questions, a conceptual framework was utilized based on the philosophies of prior researchers. In order to explore in greater depth and develop a better understanding the educational experiences of African American students with disabilities in alternative school settings and make sense of their futures concepts were utilized from Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, (2013) combination of Bell's (1970) Critical Race Theory and Ferri's (2003) Disability Studies to propose a new theoretical framework that looks at race and ability Dis/ability Critical Race Studies or DisCrit (the construction of race and disability in education and US society).

All of the participants were African American, had been identified as students placed "at-risk" for academic or behavioral areas of weakness, been identified as a student with a disability, had documented behavioral or academic areas of weakness that impacted their education, and were placed in the alternative school setting at some point in their educational experience. Four out of the five participants were identified as students placed "at-risk" during their elementary years of schooling and one was identified as students placed "at-risk" in middle school exhibiting academic and behavioral areas of weakness that hindered their educational progress. Three out

of the five participants were identified as a student with a learning disability in the area of

reading and the other two participants were found eligible for special education services under

the Other Health Impairment category. Four out of the five participants displayed behavioral

difficulties in the classroom during their elementary school years or at the beginning of middle

school years. Three out of the five participants incurred numerous behavioral referrals and were

routinely suspended from school before attending the alternative high school.

Creating a Divide

As Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, (2016) explain the Dis/ability Critical Race Studies or

DisCrit Theory, acknowledges the constructs of disability and race that are interwoven within the

educational system. There is a clear divide between regular education and special education due

to the given labels. The labels determine how the student will be served, where the student will

be served, and by whom the student will be served. The labels became the students defining

story. As noted by Bell (1992) there has been a long standing educational problem mainly in the

experiences of individuals of color. All of the students began their educational journeys already

carrying a label since society has tried to prove inferiority and lower intelligence in African

Americans in order to justify unequal treatment of people of color throughout history

(Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). Furthermore, all of the students carry the label of being

students placed "at-risk" of failure in the public school system. The DisCrit Theory looks at

whether disproportionate outcomes are due to limited school structures and opportunities, such

as inadequate research based interventions, poor instructional capacities, and or discriminatory

beliefs in the educational setting (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016). The students' stories

become even further divided from the norm when they were labeled with a disability. Consistent

with Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, (2016) DisCrit Theory, each individual has a multidimensional identity that should be taken into full account and valued.

Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, (2016) draw upon the Critical Race Theory and DisCrit Theory to connect the overrepresentation of African Americans identified as a student with disabilities and the school to prison pipeline. All participants had documented unacceptable behaviors in the school setting. Several of the students had numerous documented accounts of aggressive behavior, disrespect to staff, and classroom disruption. On several occasions the students were suspended from the school environment due to these behaviors. As the school years progressed the students' academic failures and behavioral occurrences increased in the classroom leading into placement in the alternative school setting. All of the participants were placed in the alternative school setting in middle school or high school for either violating a zero tolerance policy or due to academic failure.

Even after being labeled as students placed "at-risk", a student with disabilities, a behavior problem in the classroom, separated and removed from the traditional school setting the participants in this study all noted characteristics of resiliency in the face of adversity. All of the participants recognized how important getting an education is, had a desire to obtain their high school diploma, and pursue a career either in the military or further their education by obtaining a college degree.

The results for this study identify some important key aspects in the educational experiences of African American students with disabilities placed in the alternative school. From the data, four themes emerged encompassing the beginning, middle, and end of the student educational experiences. The themes are: Identified as a Student Placed "At-Risk", My Behavior Impacted my Education, Second Chance, and The End of the Story Can be Good.

Addressing the Academic Needs in the Early Years

School systems throughout the United States have begun using the RTI model to identify "at-risk" students as early as kindergarten (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2016). According to Bender & Shores (2007), Tier 1 of the RTI model begins by being implemented as soon as the student enters the school system. John was identified as a student placed "at-risk" in kindergarten. John was not making adequate progress in the regular education classroom and began receiving intensive instruction matched to his needs. PJ and Tavion were all identified as a students placed "at-risk" in first grade and Brianna was identified in the third grade. Each of the students struggled in the area of reading. Several studies have found students that struggle in reading have significantly higher rates of behavior difficulties than non-struggling readers (King, Lembke, & Reinke, 2016). Another contributing factor to academic and behavioral difficulties is an inability to focus. John and Tavion were both diagnosed in elementary school with Attention Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and found it difficult to focus in the classroom setting. King, Lembke, and Reinke (2016) findings that attention problems associated with ADHD can account for a majority of academic and behavioral issues students' exhibit in the classroom. Once the participants were labeled "at-risk" the student were identified in school records as individuals in need of additional academic or behavioral support (Bender & Shores, 2007).

Four of the participants received instructional interventions as soon as they were identified as a student placed "at-risk". John, PJ, Tavion, and Brianna received individual one on one instruction and small group instruction to assist in the area of reading. According to What Works Clearinghouse (2015), Tier 2 interventions should be provided to students in a small group environment and designed to meet the student's individual needs. PJ, Brianna, and Tavion

all recalled being pulled out of the regular education classroom in order to receive individualized

reading instruction. PJ, Brianna, and Tavion were all placed in an Early Intervention Program

that was designed to serve students who are placed "at-risk". The Early Intervention Program

provided the participants additional instructional resources to help them obtain the necessary

academic skills to reach grade level performance in the shortest possible time (Georgia

Department of Education, 2015).

     Each of the students progressed to Tier 3 in the RTI model in a very short amount of time

and referred for Student Support Team (SST). Tier 3 was used as a tertiary prevention that

included intensive interventions (Harris-Murri, N., King, K., & Rostenberg, D., 2006). Tier 3

interventions led educators to a more meaningful identification of the learning disability. All four

of the participants were unresponsive to the interventions that the school system had put in place

and were in need of more intensive instruction, which are special education services (Fuchs,

Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010).

     Tier 4 provided the participants with specialized instruction which referred to the student

being placed in Special Education so the student can receive instruction by a specially trained

teachers (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). John was found eligible in Kindergarten for

Significant Developmental Delay and later evaluated in second grade and found eligible under

the Other Health Impairment category. PJ, Brianna, and Tavion were all found eligible for

special education services under the Specific Learning Disability Category. PJ was found eligible

in second grade. Brianna was found eligible in fourth grade, but Tavion remained on Tier 3 the

longest and was found eligible in fifth grade. The results in this study found that John and PJ

both got in trouble in elementary school which aligns with Banks and Obiakor (2015) findings

that one of the most common reasons that students are referred to special education is due to

behavioral nonconformity. Just like John, Heather was found eligible for Other Health Impairment after she began displaying behavioral outburst in the eighth grade. Research has shown that unconscious bias, stereotypes, and inequitable implementation of discipline policies can be a contributing factor in the identification and placement of minority students in special education (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006).

As this study showed, early identification of deficit areas and the implementation of interventions has an impact on the placement of African American students in special education services. This is consistent with Proctor, Graves, and Esch's (2012) research that RTI focuses on prevention and early identification of students placed "at-risk" that experience academic and behavioral concerns, whereas providing educators a more formal method of support to assist the students. On the other hand, do the established interventions truly meet the needs of African American students placed "at-risk" in today's school systems from continuing to have academic and behavioral difficulties or is this another means of legalized institutional segregation?

Are Discipline Policies the Only Option?

Researchers have noted that the co-occurrence of academic and behavioral problems found in young children can have a long-term negative impact on students' academic outcomes (King, Lembke, & Reinke, 2016). The results in this study found that four out of the five participants in the study began getting in more severe trouble in the middle school years of their life. The participants' behavioral records indicated an increase in behavioral outburst and a more likelihood that a consequence would be attached to the behavior. PJ describes an example of this:

> I got in trouble a lot for talking. I just like talking so um I got in
>
> trouble a lot so I went to ISS a lot for talking. It was like hush or

> we going to send you out the room, we going to send you out the
>
> room.

Even Tavion noted that he had been doing well in school until he entered middle school and felt that his behavior attributed to him being retained in the 7th grade.

Four out of the five students in the study had documented behavioral referrals for exhibiting the same types of behaviors in the classroom (disruption to class, talking, and disrespect to staff). Proctor, Graves, and Esch (2012) noted that African American receive more discipline referrals and are punished more severely for the same behavior exhibited by their White peers. John recalled:

> When we be going to school I be like I'm not doing nothing today
>
> so I just go in the class and put my head down and go to sleep and
>
> not do no work or some teachers would just write me or send me
>
> down to the front office cause I wasn't doing my work.

Annamma, Connor, & Ferri (2016) discussed that some teachers and administrators enforce discipline policies that create a school climate that creates a racial working identity. School with racial working identity tend to punish any acts commented by African American or Hispanic students, mainly those with special needs that violate school culture or do not exhibit behavioral expectations that are consistent with school conformity. Trends in disciplinary actions of African Americans have been connected to multiple behavioral office referrals for a variety of reasons (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Heather, John, and Tavion participants in the study all had over 50 documented behavioral referrals in their educational records. Other researchers have documented a continuous cycle where the same behaviors occur in the classroom and teachers

and administrators are more prone to use a disciplinary practice to try to correct the student's

behavior.

      Suspension is the most widely used form of disciplinary practices for African American

students in the American school system (Noltemeyer, Marie, Mcloughlin, & Vanderwood, 2015;

Gay, 2010). Heather, John, and Tavion all had an excessive number of in school suspensions, bus

suspensions, and out of school suspensions for various behaviors such as, fighting, classroom

disruption, and disrespect to staff. There continues to be a documented discipline gap between

Caucasian and African American students that is directly linked to the enactment of the zero

tolerance policies. In eight grade Tavion and Heather found themselves being placed at the

alternative middle school for breaking a zero tolerance discipline policy. Tavion was placed for

gang related activity on the school property and Heather was placed because she had forged the

signature of her guardian on a school document. As noted by Booker and Mitchell (2011) in

previous research that predetermined consequences or punishments include automatic

suspension or placement in the alternative school based off an extended list of offenses,

including alcohol and drug violations, physical assault and fighting, criminal damage to property,

and chronic disruption in the learning environment. Heather, Tavion, and Brianna were all placed

in the alternative high school due to violating zero tolerance policies. Heather violated the zero

tolerance policy for fighting on school campus and Tavion violated the zero tolerance policy for

possession of a stolen item on school campus. Brianna's story was the most concerning because

she had displayed the least amount of behavior and was known as a students that always

followed the rules. Brianna describes an example of this:

                I always meet up with my boyfriend and uh and we had like we

                walked around school like everyone does and like we went to a

> corner inside the building and I had performed oral sex on him. I
>
> was going to get into trouble and not being at my regular school
>
> anymore. It was the first time I had been suspended.

Kajs' (2006) study suggested that the enactment of zero tolerance policies can have seriously harmful consequences especially for those students that are first time offenders such as emotional development with regard to trust in the educational system. Brianna was a first time offender and had never been suspended prior to her 9th grade school year. She was 15 years old and broke a zero tolerance policy that had her placed in a police car and taken down to the court house. Brianna did not verbally say that the consequence of being placed in a police car and taken down to the court house was out of the ordinary but was obviously emotionally upset by the situation because her eyes began to tear up when she recalled the story.

Researcher has identified a connection between behavioral difficulties and academic success. After reviewing several studies on student dropout rates it was noted that the contributing factors associated with course failure are learning behaviors attitudes, demographics, and characteristics of family and school. Also, the Baltimore Education Research Consortium acknowledged that poor grades and course failure are strong predictors of high school dropout (Casillas, Robbins, Allen, Kuo, Hanson, & Schmeiser, 2012). Heather, PJ, and John all experienced a decrease in their grades and began failing their classes. Banks and Obiakor (2015) noted that students who are perceived as not cooperative are rated as having poor academic performance in the school system. John describes an example of this:

> Not staying up in class, not doing none of my work, and my grades
>
> were just dropping. They were just giving me 0's in the classroom.

> The more trouble I get in the more I was out of school and the
>
> more I was failing.

As this study showed, there was pattern in behavioral and academic concerns that

eventually lead the students to placement in the alternative school setting. Carswell, Hanlon,

Watts and O'Gardy, (2014) findings suggest that students placed in DAEPs usually come from

the traditional school setting with multiple unmet academic and behavioral needs. This is

consistent with Annamma, Connor, and Ferri's (2016), statement that our identities as "smart"

and "good" or "not smart" and "not good" are shaped by the cultural institutions that traditional

schooling has put in place.

Alternative Route to Success

Booker and Mitchell (2011), along with Carswell, Hanlon, and O'Gardy (2009), asserted

that DAEPS are designed to serve students who do not experience success in the traditional

school setting due to academic and behavioral areas of weakness. All of the participants in this

study except for Brianna were experiencing both academic and behavioral difficulties at their

base school when they were placed in the alternative school setting.

John described it as:

> I wanted to come to alternative school because I was failing in the
>
> public school and I was getting distracted in class and wasn't doing
>
> my work and stayed getting in trouble.

PJ explained:

> I was behind on my credits, probably 4 credits and I wasn't going
>
> to school so they gave me the alternative of coming here or not
>
> graduating on time at my base school.

These finding coincides with Izumi, Shen and Xia (2013) notation of one study

conducted in Oregon public schools that without DAEPS the school system would probably face

a greater epidemic of students dropping out of high school. Since both John and PJ were falling

further behind in their academic studies they had a greater likelihood of dropping out of high

school. PJ described it here:

> Some days I wanted to quit school because the class I did before, I just
>
> wanted to quit.

DAEPS are seen as a second chance for students that are experiencing behavioral and

academic difficulty in the traditional school setting (Lange, 1998; Carswell, Hanlon, & O'Grady,

2009). Most of the alternative school programs are designed to meet a variety of academic and

behavioral needs that prevent students from dropping out of school (Lehr et al., 2004). John,

Heather, Tavion, and PJ were all behind in their academic credits and the alternative school

setting helped the students to get back on track. Heather described it:

> When I was at alternative school and I caught up there. I passed
>
> my classes because they were easier.

The smaller environment, low teacher ratios, and supplemental support services in turn

provide an easier learning environment for most students that have struggled in the traditional

school setting which in turn decreases the likelihood of school failure (Carswell, Hanlon, Watts,

& O'Grady, 2014; Lehr et al., 2004). The students are able to re-connect with their academics

and focus on their goal of being successful in school. Heather, John, and PJ all saw the smaller

learning environment as a benefit that allowed them to be successful in school. John described it

as:

> By you being in that smaller classroom you can focus better and
>
> you are able to get more work done like you are supposed to but
>
> that is just for me how I feel because being in a smaller classroom
>
> helps me to focus better and do my work.

PJ explained:

> Yes it is working for me because I want to graduate but some
>
> people they just need a boost. I think alternative school is more of
>
> a laid back situation then the base school. It was at your own pace.
>
> It is a smaller environment.

Heather recalled:

> I think it is better for me to be somewhere small then big. I'm
>
> better in small places yea I see I did better over there then at the
>
> base school. I can focus, um to stay focused and do what I needed
>
> to do.

The smaller classroom environment did not only allow the students to focus on their academics but it also allowed the students to develop positive relationships with the staff in the building (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007). Three of the five students in the student discussed positive relationships that they had established while in the alternative school environment. PJ described it best:

> Well my favorite teacher here was Mrs. Green. She was like cool.
>
> Like I guess she is not going to sugar coat anything. Her class was
>
> relaxed.

Heather recalled:

There was this one teacher but I forgot her name. She helped me

um she helped like she was there out of all the other teachers she

was just there and she seemed like she cared and she talked to me.

Tavion's recollection of the principal of the alternative school going beyond the call of duty and

attending one of Tavion's high school football games shows how a smaller school environment

can have a very large effect on an ability to create positive relationships. Tavion explains it:

The principal he was always cool with me. He would be like what

up big man and uh and when you get back I want you to be playing

football and I'm going to come see you. Yea he came to see me.

Yea he was right there when we was walking down you know the

bell out there he was right there. He shook my hand and all that.

According to De La Ossa (2005), alternative schools help students enhance positive

characteristics like higher satisfaction with their schooling experience, higher self-esteem, and

more positive attitudes toward school, improved school attendance, higher academic

performance, and a decrease in disruptive behaviors than when they attended the traditional

school setting. Lehr et al. (2004) also found that students who attend alternative school felt safer

and cared for, their grades and behavior improved, and felt supported by the staff (Lehr et al.,

2004). All the participants' stories included some form of self-improvement while attending the

alternative high school. John described it as:

Uh everything got better like I stopped getting into trouble, I

started focusing more doing my work and passing my classes. It

took me the semester of my 11th grade year and now and now I am

all caught up now.

Thornton and Sanchaz (2010) research aligned with the findings in this study that alternative schools provide students with disabilities the ability to reengage with the school environment by providing a more successful school experience which improves their likelihood of graduating. All of the participants in this study had been identified as a student with a disability early on in the academic careers. Three out of five students explained that alternative school provided them with an opportunity to focus in school, pass their classes, and remain on track to graduate on time. John described it as:

> If I go back right now I know for a fact that I won't be going to
> school and I won't be focused and I get distracted easily. They
> give us a lot of work and when I was the base school and just the
> classroom gets to be so full like 20 to 25 that sometimes there be
> like one teacher and it is like everybody need help and everybody
> need help on something and it's like she can't come around or he
> can't come around and help everybody because he was trying to
> help other people and by the time and by that time the bell
> probably be ringing and you still couldn't get no help

As this study showed, alternative school provided the participants an opportunity to focus in a smaller learning environment, recover lost credit hours, and build positive relationships with individuals whom they may have never had the opportunity to get to know in the larger school environment. This finding aligns with Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, and Marcotte, (2014) research that students placed "at-risk" can overcome the risk of dropping out of school and are able to distance themselves from risks in order to seize opportunities and demonstrate a number of benefits in different areas of their life. Even though the participants in this study were able to

overcome several challenges in the face of adversity, Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2016), found

that the removal of students from the traditional setting is yet another way to identify students

that society deems outside of the norm and is a continuum of state-sanctioned exclusion and

marginalization for African American students with disabilities.

Resiliency in the Face of Adversity

Alternative schools provide a flexible learning environment that allows students to

develop characteristics of resiliency. All of five of the participants in this study exhibited

characteristics of resiliency in the face of adversity. Lehr et al. (2004) noted that one way to

increase resiliency is by involving students in "required helpfulness". Required helpfulness is

when students volunteer to work to help others in need. Alternative schools offer educational

programs that focus on individualized instruction, social services, and or community based

learning (Lehr et al., 2004). All of the students in this study were exposed to a service learning

project while placed in the alternative school environment. The findings in this study aligned

with Nelson and Sneller's (2011) research that service learning helps individuals realize valuable

strengths and that they can contribute to others that are in need of help. John, PJ, and Heather

became very involved in the service learning project at the alternative school and learned that

there are individuals in the world that are in greater need then themselves. PJ explained:

> It made me feel like I had it easy like my life was easy compared
>
> to them um like I have everything I wanted and they didn't even
>
> have shoes to put on their feet and I have 20 pairs of shoes to put
>
> on my feet so it made me really look to see how much I really
>
> have. It made me value more of what I have.

Heather recalled her experience with the service learning project

> They need more stuff then we do. It was sad and we needed to help
>
> more. I learned to be thankful for what you got cause they don't
>
> have anything and not to judge off of what you see. Just to help out
>
> like show that I cared. It showed me to be more thankful for what I
>
> got because just be thankful.

John described:

> Somewhat it just opened my eyes to try to help other people just
>
> because they might be far away from me that just doesn't mean
>
> they don't need help. What I felt about it is knowing that I am
>
> helping other kids and stuff like that.

These activities led to a purpose in life and increased the students placed "at-risk" ability

to care about others by allowing the students to realize there are people in the world that even

they can help (McMillan & Reed, 1994).

Martin and Marsh (2006) defined resiliency as the process of, capacity for, and the

adaptions of overcoming challenging and threating circumstances. Each of the narrative stories

discussed overcoming academic struggles and behavioral concerns in the school environment.

John, Brianna, Tavion, and PJ all overcame academic struggles from an early age in the area of

reading. John, Tavion, PJ, and Heather all described failing multiple classes and overcoming the

challenges in order to recover lost credits and pass their classes.

Lessard, Butler-Kisber, Fortin, and Marcotte, (2014) identified four predictors of resilient

behavior, such as, control, planning, low anxiety, and persistence. All of the participants intend

on graduating from high school which shows they have control over their future outcomes and

have devised a plan to accomplish their goals by adapting to personal situations in their lives

(Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). Even after becoming a father at the age of 17, John finds that his

little girl keeps him focused because he knows that she needs to be taken care of and that he must

stay focused in order to get her what she needs. PJ knows her plan and what she must do in

order to reach her goal of one day become a Registered Nurse. PJ explains:

> I plan to finish high school by the end of February and um
>
> currently I am working, I work a full time job and I will continue
>
> to work and I am moving into my own apartment March the 1st and
>
> um I um I plan on starting the nurse class over in August. I will be
>
> certified as a CNA.

Heather acknowledges that she still struggles in her academics but has established a plan

for how she can achieve her goal to graduate from high school. Heather described it:

> I was going to go to the Learning Center. It's over by the Career
>
> School, its where you take your classes on the computer, it's like
>
> whatever classes you missed you can catch up on them so you can
>
> graduate on time.

Benard (1993) noted that there are protective factors associate with resiliency in an

individual such as, social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and sense of purpose

and future. All of the participants have a sense of purpose and a longing to be successful in the

future. John describes it:

> My plans for my future is going to the navy and doing something
>
> with my life instead of being out here on the streets and not doing
>
> nothing, so I can give to my little daughter and take care of her and
>
> show her from right and wrong.

Tavion explains:

> My number 1 goal is to finish up school first. That's the first thing.
> After I finish college and all that have some kids and take care of
> my kids, get old, watch my kids grow up and then get old. Then
> live an old life. My goals are to finish school and save up more
> money than I have and like be the best I can be in life. I plan to
> reach my goals just one step at a time.

PJ describes her future goals:

> My goals are to pursue my RN career and um have good credit and
> um to pay off my car and to be more uh to grow and to grow and
> become a better person.

Heather describes her dreams in the future:

> I was thinking about going into the air force and I have taken the
> ASVAB before I went to alternative school. I was thinking about
> being an ultra sound tech.

Brianna dreams of one day being a pediatrician explained here:

> I dream of becoming a pediatrician doctor and staying positive. I
> like children and taking care of children and I like to know like
> what's into a pediatrician doctor.

One key aspect of resiliency is having realistic future plans and the capabilities to problem solve in order to accomplish those plans (Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). Each of the participants discussed how important it was for them to have a career in order to be successful later on in life. John explains:

> I define success as you accomplish what you said you was going to
>
> accomplish or your goal that you said you were going to do and
>
> that's really what it is. I am going to do it and when I'm going to
>
> do it and how it is going to affect me and my family and when I
>
> finish school and I will have to be in the real world and I got to do
>
> what I got to do.

Tavion described it:

> Most important to me is like having a good job if you don't have a
>
> good job you want be successful I mean you can be successful but
>
> you not going to be successful in a good way.

PJ noted:

> Being in a career is the most important to me, being able to take
>
> care of myself and standing on my own two feet.

Another attributes of resiliency that the participants displayed was the ability to be accountable for ones actions (Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). Tavion, Brianna, and Heather all acknowledged regret for their actions and felt that the alternative school environment helped them to realize that they could do better at school. Brianna explained:

> I should not have done that and it was very wrong to do. I felt like
>
> that wasn't what I was supposed to do. I feel like I shouldn't have
>
> ever done that and I trying to learn in school. Well like not having
>
> that in my mind to not do that anymore. Like coming back to the
>
> base school I remembered what I did and I just have to remember
>
> not to do that anymore.

Tavion explained:

> I learned how to leave some stuff alone and like you know I just
>
> learned from my mistake. I just got to be around the right people.

Heather described:

> I wasn't proud of myself.

Thornton and Sanchez (2010) further discussed that there are three factors that can support students toward their academic goals which include the student's intelligence and temperament, family and family support, and the most important is external supports. All of the students in this study could identify individuals in their life that provided the needed support to be successful in school and strive to accomplish their goals. John's biggest influences in his life and what keeps him motivated to be successful are his mother, father, and his little girl. John explained:

> What I need most to reach my goals is my mother so she can keep
>
> me focused and have my confidence up so I can move to the navy.

Tavion explained:

> My biggest influences in my life are his grandmother, my dad, the
>
> rest of his family because they are always getting on to me about
>
> being good, staying on track, and staying focused in school.

PJ described:

> My grandma and my grandparents on my dad's side have
>
> influenced me because they push me and they want to see me do
>
> better then what my parents did and what they did.

Heather and Brianna both feel that their mothers and their aunts are the biggest influences in

their life. These finding concur with Truebridge and Benard (2013) research that the three

protective factors that strengthen resiliency in individuals are having caring relationships, having

high expectations, as well as, the opportunity to participate and contribute.

Implications

This study's findings have implications for teachers, colleges and universities, district

and school leaders, policymakers, and researchers. A discussion of the implications takes place

in the following four sections: implications for educators in traditional schools, teacher

preparation programs, school and district administrators, policymakers, and future researchers.

Implications for Educators in Tradition Schools

Educational reform is moving toward a more individualized instructional model to

combat educational and behavioral concerns in the classroom. One way to assist in the correct

academic and behavioral concerns is for teachers to foster a greater sense of cultural awareness

in the classroom in order to understand the connection between culture, student academic

progress, and behavioral expectations (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). African Americans have

struggled with being provided quality education and teacher preparation can be a key component

in the problem. Teachers are the leader or authority figure for the students in the classroom. The

teacher is seen as all-knowing and sometimes assumes that role unintentionally with minority

students because of poverty or cultural differences (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Teacher may not be

aware that African Americans students are being treated as inferior in the classroom setting

(Scherff & Spector, 2011). In order to combat the disproportionate suspension and placement of

student with disabilities in the alternative school, educators in the traditional school setting must

recognize that African American are a distinct cultural group and not presume that black children

are exactly like white children when it comes to their learning styles (Ladson-Billings, 2009). In

order to increase academic and behavioral expectations of African American students, these

cultural responsive expectations need to be identified and changed in the classroom environment

(Scherff & Spector, 2011).

Structure is a key component in the classroom and African American students benefit

from the routine (Scherff & Spector, 2011). Culturally responsive classrooms focus on a

disciplined environment rather than a punitive environment. Off task and disruptive behavior

that is dealt with by punitive actions results in excluding students from valuable classroom

opportunities to learn important academic and social skills. In order to counteract the association

of discipline through punishment, teachers should incorporate socially appropriate behavior

models in the classroom through systematic planning, teaching, and evaluation (Cartledge &

Kourea, 2008).

Implications for Teacher Preparation Programs

The field of education is changing as the student population becomes more diverse

throughout the United States. Teachers are required to individualize classroom instruction that

targets the academic and behavioral needs of each and every student that is educated in the

public school system. Future educators enter university programs and are expected after

graduation to be fully prepared to educate this diverse population of students, no matter the

academic or behavioral challenges the student's exhibit in the classroom. This study included

five African American participants that entered the educational system with academic areas of

weakness mainly found in reading that led into being identified as a student with a disability.

The participants in this study also exhibited behavioral concerns in the classroom that eventually

contributed to their placement in the alternative school setting.

Regular and special education teachers are obligated when they enter the classroom to possess an in-depth understanding of how to educate the diverse population of students' academic areas of weakness while implementing behavior strategies that allow the students to be successful in the classroom. In order to prepare our future educators, colleges and universities should consider including Culturally Responsive Response to Intervention as a part of the curriculum. Culturally Responsive Response to Intervention delivers culturally responsive interventions to improve academic weaknesses and addresses behaviors that act as barriers to achieve success in the school system (Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011). Future educators in the programs should be exposed to how to identify academic and behavior needs of students in the classroom, learn how to collaborate with the stakeholders in the school in order to create a plan that provides the student with appropriate culturally responsive interventions. Currently, colleges and university's education programs address the multi-tiered approach of RTI and the use of evidence based interventions but fail to include how teachers can recognize and respond to the cultural difference of the students they will be teaching in the classroom. Educators will need training on how to identify and adjust core academic and behavioral standards to include positive cultural behavior support that emphasizes cultural responsiveness across all curriculum areas. For example, after the teacher learns about the student's cultural background and interest the teacher can create instructional materials that improve the student's academic achievement. One way to broaden African Americans students' connections to African culture is giving assignments that connect to the student's community and interest. The teacher can use the state curriculum but also realize that his or her students could not only rely on the text books and that additional cultural responsive content needs to be developed. Cultural responsive teaching creates a connection between classroom experience and the student's everyday lives (Ladson-

Billings, 2009). Teachers can provide cultural diverse students with intensive instruction that in

turn can be a preventative measure to minimize learning disabilities for the student. Future

educators need to be taught how to consider cultural responsive instruction, cultural responsive

discipline, and cultural responsive interventions at all stages of the diverse students' academic

years. Future educators need to learn how to examine a cultural diverse student's academic and

behavioral record and review how cultural difference can have had an impact on interpreting the

instructional and behavioral data. Misinterpretations of data can result in an inappropriate

placement in special education (Harris-Murri, King, & Rostenberg, 2006). Colleges and

universities need to expand on the traditional conventional instruction and teach future educators

to learn to respect the cultural and linguistic characteristic of culturally diverse youth to enhance

student achievement (Gay, 2010).

Implications for School and District Administrators

College and career gaps exist in the United States educational system (U.S. Department

of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2012). According to the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) more than 5.7 million students ages 6–21 in the United States

have been identified as having a disability and receive special education services. Furthermore,

President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on December 10,

2015 which requires states to develop identification and interventions to support schools where

subgroups are failing behind and high schools with high dropout rates (U.S. Department of

Education, 2015). Statistics show that students with disabilities are twice as likely to drop out of

school in comparison to their non-disabled peers in general education (Bost & Riccomini, 2006;

Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, & Regional Educational Laboratory West, 2014).

There are several factors associated with students with disabilities dropping out of school, such

as, low socioeconomic status of the family, lack of books or reading materials at home, level of

schooling of the parent of the same gender, low grades in school, prior academic failure,

aggressive behavior, and school size. Researchers have noted that alternative schools provide

students a second chance at acquiring a high school diploma but the alternative programs are not

designed to assist students in pursuing career or college related opportunities. Students that

graduate from alternative schools often lack the skills and the knowledge required to be

successful in post-secondary education or even in the workplace (De La Ossa, 2005). To address

the career and college gap, school and district leaders must provide students with the same

opportunities that are provided in the traditional school setting such as, providing career based

elective courses and classes that provide the rigor comparable to the base school courses.

Traditional schools allow students to take college prep courses that eventually lead the

students into a career path, whereas, alternative schools offer students minimal course offerings

with a majority of the courses offered on the computer. Students that have been placed in the

alternative school are not allowed on the campuses of the traditional schools which closes any

doors to advanced curriculum.

When a student is placed in the alternative school setting for academic and behavioral

concerns this is an opportunity for educators to provide the needed supports to assist the students

in becoming productive citizens in society. School and District Administrators need to re-look at

providing students the same opportunity as other students to prepare them for a better future. The

leaders in the school system should also review alternative school programs in their district and

provide the funding needed to properly staff, as well as, provide programs designed to assist

students placed "at-risk" from becoming the next generation to be placed in the prison systems.

Implications for State Level Policymakers

Exclusion from schools has been used as a corrective punishment throughout the U.S as a deterrent for misbehavior in the public school system for decades (Noltemeyer, Marie, Mcloughlin, & Vanderwood, 2015). The discipline gap for African American students has been linked to the federal influence on school discipline through the enactment of the zero tolerance discipline policies. Policymakers have made the basic assumption that punishment would be a deterrent for students not to break the established rules (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). However, this assumption has been proven wrong time and time again. These patterns of discipline have worsened with an increase in the suspension rates and alternative school placements for students who violate the zero tolerance policies. District, state, and federal policy- makers have been asked to develop a more constructive alternative to school discipline that does not exclude students from the school setting (Skiba & Losen, 2015).

In order to break the cycle of the use of punishment to correct behavior, policymakers should consider alternative measures to combat the discipline problems in the school systems. One way to address misconduct in the schools is by removing the current zero tolerance policy and replacing it with a new state-wide policy that looks at school systems implementing a restorative justice model. Restorative justice moves away from the use of suspension, expulsion, and alternative school placement to a more resolution based approach to behavioral infractions exhibited by students. Restorative justice practices give students the opportunity to be held accountable for their actions while allowing them to restore and repair the damage that their actions rendered (Teasley, 2014; Skiba & Losen, 2015). Restorative justice practices provide school administrators and teachers collaboration tools to solve disciplinary violations, such as, peer conflict, chronic disruption, bullying, and criminal activity within the school setting (Pavelka, 2013).

Restorative justice practices include: peer mediation, peer accountability boards, conferencing, and circles. Peer mediation resolves conflicts between two or more students by utilizing conflict resolution skills and social competencies to reduce the threat of violence in the school setting. Peer/accountability boards include a board of individuals primarily composed of student peers, the victims, and the wrongdoer to delineate a case plan for the wrongdoer to be held accountable for his or her actions.   The case plan can include but is not limited to these resolution for the action, the wrongdoer may be required to write an apology letter to the victim, pay restitution to the victim, receive tutoring after school hours, receive mentoring, placed in counseling services, or be given community service hours. Conferencing involves a larger group of participants (victims, wrongdoer, family of both students, friends, and any other key supporters) to be included in the resolution meeting that focus on how the wrongdoers actions impacted each of the participants in the conference. Circles are very similar to conferencing but include justice system officials, social service staff, law enforcement, and other individuals that are involved in the wrongdoer or victim's life. The participants in the circle discuss the effects of the offender's actions and offers suggestions to seek reparation (Pavelka, 2013).

Approximately, 12 to 19 states in the United States have already moved away from the use of the zero tolerance policy and have begun implementing restorative justice models in the school systems (Teasley, 2014; Skiba & Losen, 2015). The results of the implementation of restorative justice practices have been positive for the schools, teachers, and students involved in the alternative approach to discipline. The schools have had a significant decrease in the number of students being expelled, exhibiting misconduct in the school setting, and committing violent acts (Teasley, 2014; Skiba & Losen, 2015). This is why state policymakers should move away

from the outdated punitive approach, and move toward an alternative method such as the restorative justice model.

Implications for Future Research

There continues to be limited research on alternative school educational programs and the outcomes for students that attend them. Further investigation is necessary to explore if schools have begun to implement cultural responsive interventions to combat the disproportionate representation of African American students found eligible for special education services and decrease suspension of culturally related behaviors. Findings in this study shed light on the need for teachers, administrators to relook at how alternative schools are preparing students for future educational opportunities by allowing students placed "at-risk" the opportunity to recover lost credits in order to graduate. Further research is needed to seek an understanding if those students have acquired the knowledge and the skills to pursue higher educational opportunities or obtain gainful employment after graduating from high school. After interviewing the participants in this study it was obvious that students that attend alternative school do lose out on opportunities that the traditional schools offer. Alternative schools have been structured under the punitive policies that have been enacted in the US to combat discipline problems in the school system. Further research is needed in the area of to identify school systems that have veered away from the punitive structure and implemented the restorative justice model to educating students placed "at-risk". This findings in this study also highlighted that all of the participants have a goal to pursue higher education or enter into a career path after graduating from high school. Since this study looks at the trajectory of the students educational experiences further research is needed in looking at the students future outcomes after graduating from high school to investigate if they meet their intended goals.

Finding from this study indicated that the parents and family members of the individuals had a tremendous impact on the student's educational endeavors. Further investigation based off of perceptions of the parents or guardians of the students placed "at-risk" would be beneficial in aiding students in the educational system.

Continued research is needed when investigating students placed "at-risk" in the educational system and through the qualitative research model researchers can gain insight from the individuals involved in the process. Educators, administrators, district leaders, and policymakers can learn from the research in order to prevent students placed "at-risk" from becoming part of the national statistical data as the most likely student to drop out of the educational system. A diagram of the implications of the study is presented in Figure 10.1.
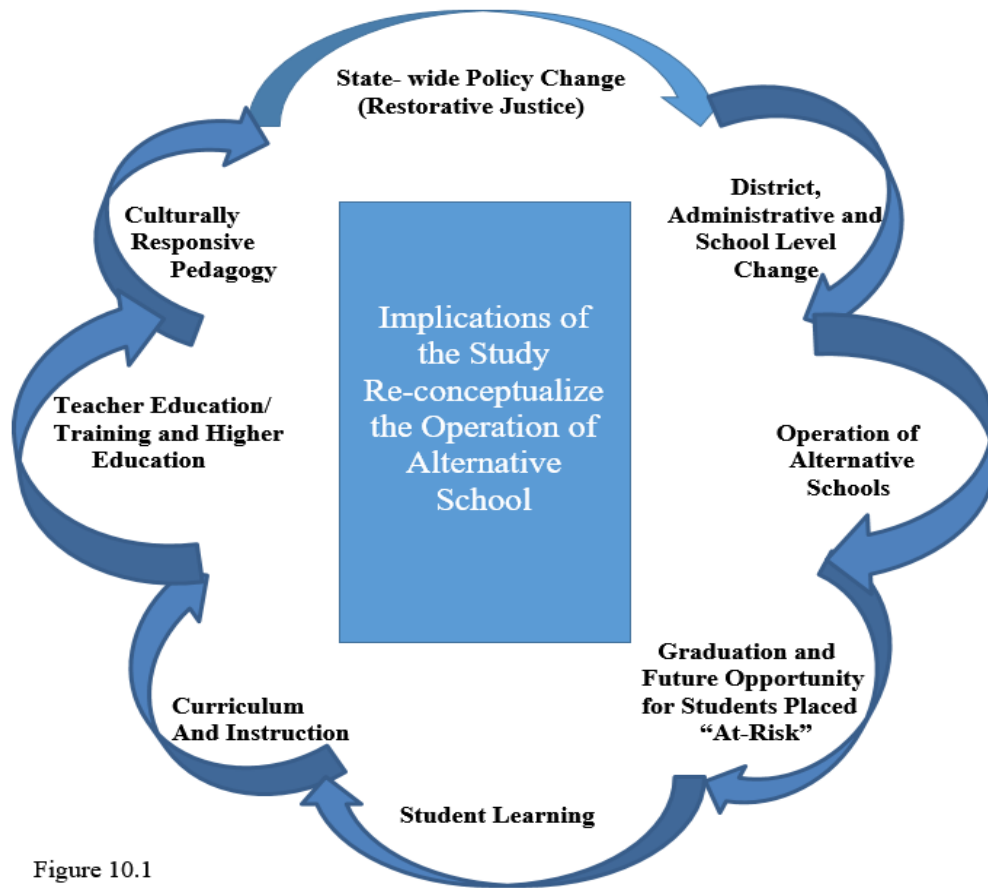
Figure 10.1

Conclusion

Historically, African American students have been over-represented in the school system as students with disabilities (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016). The Response to Intervention (RTI) model can assist schools in determining if an African American student is placed "at-risk" of academic and behavioral challenges, but if the student does not respond to the behavioral interventions then the student will be identified as a student with a conduct disorder or in need of special education services. Findings from this study add to literature, further investigating how African American students with disabilities need academic and behavioral interventions based on

the RTI model as soon as how they are identified as students placed "at-risk". School systems across the United States need to begin to question if the behaviors that African American students display in the classroom are culturally based and what interventions that educators can implement to ensure the success of the student to decrease the academic and behavioral concerns during the elementary and middle school years. Educators need to identify the behavior in the problem identification stage of the RTI model that includes a baseline of data specific to the behavior. The problem analysis stage helps the teacher formulate a solution to the problem. Educators need to move beyond the conceptualization of that the problem lies within the child and look at all factors that may influence the student's behavior such as the teacher or others behavior being included in the problem definition. The findings in this study identified that the school system did use academic and behavioral interventions but the interventions were not culturally responsive to the student's needs. The students received limited and generic interventions before being identified as a student with a disability. If the students in this study had been provided the needed supports they may have been more successful in the classroom or not even identified as a student with a disability.

Participants in this study recognized that their behavior and academic failures had an impact on their education which is the first step in being able to correct the behavior. The alternative school setting did provide students placed "at-risk" a second opportunity to succeed and allowed the students who had failed multiple courses and been suspended another means of obtaining an education (Carswell, Hanlon, Watts, & O'Grady, 2014). The smaller environment assisted several of the African American students with disabilities the ability to focus and reengage in the educational setting. The individuals in the study acknowledged that the flexible school setting allowed them to participate in a service learning project that they most likely

would not have been exposed to in the traditional school setting. Whereas, service learning

helped the students to capitalize on their positive attributes and in turn develop resilient

characteristics toward academic success (Nelson & Eckstein, 2008). Alternative school allowed

students that had an educational history of continuous failure and consequences to understand the

importance of obtaining their education thus providing them an opportunity to be more

successful in their life.

This study further solidified that African American students with disabilities are resilient

in the face of adversity. In the beginning and all the way toward the end of the participants

educational experiences the students were identified and labeled based on their race, educational

weaknesses, behavioral outcomes, and still found a way to see their own accomplishments, as

well as, purpose in the future.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about your educational experiences in elementary school?
2. Why were you placed at alternative school?
3. What were you're feeling about school before being placed at the alternative school?
4. Did you ever get in trouble at your base school? Explain.
5. What were your feelings when you were placed at the alternative school?
6. What were you're feeling about coming to alternative school?
7. How do you feel about school now?
8. Did you ever feel differently about school?
9. What would make school better?
10. Describe a typical day in the alternative school. How does your day begin and end?

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions:

1. Tell me about your service-learning experience, including what type of activity you did.
2. What did you enjoy about your service learning experience?
3. How do you think you have changed since participating in the service learning experience?
4. Tell me about an interaction you had with the teachers and peers while participating in the service learning project?
5. Do you think your experience changed your motivation to do service in the future? How? Why? Or Why not?
6. What advice would you have for other students who choose service learning?

Appendix C

Audiovisual Journal Reflection Questions:

1. What do you think about when you think about your future?
2. What do you think your life will be like once you leave high school?
3. Do you have goals for your life?
4. Tell me about your goals?
5. How are you going to reach those goals?
6. What would keep you from reaching your goals?
7. How do you think you could overcome those obstacles?
8. What is most important to you when you think about your future?
9. Who or what is the biggest influences in your life?
10. How do those influences impact your life?
11. What skills do you think you have that will help you once you graduate?
12. What do you most need so that you can reach your goals?

Appendix D

Document Analysis for Response to Intervention Folders

Type of Document:
Date of the Document:
Position Title of the Author of the Document:

Document Information:
    A. When the student was placed "at-risk"?
    B. What area of academics is the student struggling in (reading, math, writing, or behavior):
    C. List current instructional interventions in place:
    D. When the student was found eligible for special education services:
    E. What eligibility criteria is the student identified in for special education services :

Additional Notes:

Appendix E

Document Analysis for Behavioral Referral Records

Type of Document:
Date of the Document:
Position Title of the Author of the Document:

Document Information:
    A. How many office referrals are documented:
    B. What behaviors did the student display in the traditional school setting:
    C. How many behavioral referrals resulted as in school suspensions:
    D. How many behavioral referrals resulted as out of school suspensions:
    E. What interventions were put in place to assist the students behavior in the traditional school setting:
    F. What behavior did the student display to be placed in the alternative school setting:

Additional Notes:

Appendix F

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: The Trajectory of Lived Experiences of African American Students with Disabilities at an Alternative School Setting

Researcher's Contact Information
Principal Investigator: Cherry Stanard
KSU Department: Inclusive Education
Phone: 470.578.6146
Supervising KSU Faculty: Dr. Carter Hicks

Your child is being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Cherry Stanard of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to allow your child to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions if you do not understand.

Description of Project
The purpose of the study is to help us learn about how African American students with disabilities in alternative schools make sense of their lived experience. Lived experiences can be defined in this study as the student's experiences in the educational setting such as being identified as an "at-risk" student during their elementary years of education and being provided academic and or behavioral intervention to assist them with deficit areas in the school setting. Also, the student's background information of being identified as a student that required special education services in the school setting. The student's educational experience of being placed in the alternative school setting due to behavioral issues in the traditional school setting and their experience of being involved in a service learning project while placed in the alternative school setting.
Your child is being asked to take part in this study because they have been identified as a student that participated in the Response to Intervention Model (RTI) where they received instructional and/or behavioral interventions to determine if they required special education services, currently have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), previously or currently placed in the alternative school setting due to behavioral reasons, and while placed in the alternative school setting they participated in a service learning project.

Explanation of Procedures
If you decide to allow your child to be in the study, I will review and collect data on personal information which includes educational interventions implemented through the Response to Intervention Model (RTI), your child's initial special education placement records, and review behavior referrals from the traditional school setting, and the reason your child was placed in the alternative school environment. I will interview your child 2 times during an eight week period for approximately 1 hour and thirty minutes each time I meet with them. During the individual interview I will ask your child 10 open ended questions about his or her educational experiences in the alternative school setting. An example of one of the questions is: How do you feel about the process of being placed in the alternative school? Your child will also being asked to participate in 2 focus group interviews that will include another peer that he or she attended alternative school with, I will ask your child and the peer 6 open ended questions about participating in the service learning project at the alternative school. Each focus group session should last between 30 minutes to1 hour. An example of one of the questions is: Do you think your experience with service learning changed your motivation to do better in school? How? Why? Or Why not? After each individual interview session and focus group session I will ask your child to record their reflections about 12 open ended questions on an audio visual device (Flip Video tm) that they can use as a visual camera or place face down to record only their voice for about 15 minutes 3 times in a 1 week timeframe to discuss what your child sees in their future after graduating from high school. An example of one of the questions is: What do you think your life will be like once you leave high school? No other individuals will be included in the recordings, participants will only record themselves.
If at any time during the interviews your child wishes for the researcher to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, the child can let me know and we will stop the interview. Your child does not have to answer any questions that he or she does not want to answer in any of the interview sessions. Some of the educational records I will be viewing may include medical diagnosis or health related information but this information will not be included in the study. I will be gathering information from your child's academic records like in what grade

your child began receiving interventions to help with academic and behavioral concerns, what academic area your child needed additional support in (reading, math, writing, or behavior), what interventions were used to support your child in the classroom, and when your child was placed in special education along with what eligibility category they were identified in. I will look at your child's behavioral records to document how many office referrals he or she has received in the educational setting, what behaviors your child displayed in the classroom, if your child has been suspended from school along with what behavioral interventions have been put in place in the traditional school setting to support your child, and what behavior got your child placed in the alternative school setting.

Time Required
The total time for individual interviews will be approximately 3 hours over an 8 week period of time, the total time for focus group interviews will be approximately 1 to 2 hours over an 8 week period of time, and the audio visually reflections will total between 30 minutes to 45 minutes long over a 1 week period of time.

Risks or Discomforts
The potential risks of taking part in this study is that your child will be discussing experiences in his or her life that may cause them to feel emotions associated with stress or discomfort about being identified as a student with disabilities, discussing behavioral incidents that occurred in their past, and placement in the alternative school setting. If during the interview your child feels uncomfortable with the questions and wishes to stop the interview I will not precede with any further questions without his or her permission. If at any time during the interview your child feels he or she needs to speak with a counselor then the counselor from the school will be available to talk with them. There may be some questions your child feels sensitive about answering but he or she is allowed to refuse to answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable with discussing. There is a risk that if your child shares information associated with abuse toward others or toward themselves, I am a mandated reporter for the school system and am mandated by law to report such issues to the counselor or principal of the school.

Benefits
Participants might see how much improvement they have made in the educational setting over the past few years in order to have made as far as they have in the school system.
Also, this study allows participants to reflect on their educational experiences and how characteristics of resiliency impacted the student's beliefs in their capabilities to have dreams and goals for their futures.
The study allows educator's, administrators, and school personal information based on the student's voice of their experience being identified as a student with a disability through the RTI model, placed in alternative school environment, and how the implementation of service learning can help students build characteristics of resiliency in the educational setting.

Compensation
There will be no costs to your child for taking part in this study.
Your child will not receive money or any other form of compensation for taking part in this study.

Confidentiality
Name of the participant's school and participants will be pseudonyms. The participant's names and any identifiable information will not be written on the document analysis forms. During the

face to face interviews the participants will participate in private conversations with the researcher in a separate room in the school building. When participants are in the focus group interview they will be asked not to discuss any of the information outside of the interviewing session in order to protect the other participant's identity. Transcriptions from the interviews and document analysis will be kept on a password protected laptop computer that the researcher keeps in a secure location locked in a filing cabinet with the key located in a separate location. After the participants use the audio visual recordings devices the content from the device will be transcribed in Atlas ti on the researcher personal lab top that is protected by a private log in and password and kept in a locked filing cabinet with the key located in a separate location. The audio visual devices will be placed in the locked filing cabinet with the key located in a separate location. All transcripts, document analysis forms, audio/visual recordings will be deleted by July, 31 2016 from the researcher's personal lab top, and signed consent forms will be saved in researcher's locked office filing cabinet for three years.

I will be the only researcher to have access to the data collected along with my dissertation committee from Kennesaw state University and Kennesaw's Institutional Review Board (IRB). As discussed above this study does involve the audio and visual recording of the participants voice and face but all Flip cameras TM and recorded information will be protected in a secure filing cabinet with a key lock with the key being stored in a separate location. The consent forms for this study will be kept for _3_ years in a locked secure cabinet.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation

I will select six participants from one rural alternative high school in the southeast United States (six African American students with disabilities). The student participants will meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) Found eligible for special education services through the RTI model (b) currently placed in the alternative school setting or within the last school year and (3) while enrolled in alternative school participated in service learning (4) is willing to participate in the study, which includes reviewing individual interview transcriptions (5) participants are between the age of 14 to 18.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions at any time, you can ask the researcher and you can talk to your parent about the study. We will give you a copy of this form to keep. If you want to ask us questions about the study, call or email

      Cherry Stanard   678-850-0448 and cherry.stanard@cowetaschools.net

The Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed this study to make sure that the rights and safety of people who take part in the study are protected. If you have questions about your rights in the study, or you are unhappy about something that happens to you in the study, you can contact them at (678) 797-2268 or irb@kennesaw.edu.

Consent to Participate

I give my consent for my child,

_____, to participate in the research project described above. I understand that this participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty. I also understand that my child may withdraw his/her assent at any time without penalty.

_____

Signature of Parent or Authorized Representative, Date

_____

Signature of Investigator, Date

_____
_____

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Appendix G
Research Study Assent Form (15-17 Year Age Range)

Study Title: The Trajectory of Lived Experiences of African American Students with Disabilities at an Alternative School Setting

Researchers:
My name is Cherry Stanard I am from Kennesaw State University. I am inviting you to take part in a research study. Your parent(s) know we are talking with you about the study, but it is up to you to decide if you want to be in the study. This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to take part in it.
Why is this study being done?
The purpose of the study is to help us learn about how African American students with disabilities in alternative schools make sense of their lived experience. Lived experiences can be defined in this study as the student's experiences in the educational setting such as being identified as an "at-risk" student during their elementary years of education and being provided academic and or behavioral intervention to assist them with deficit areas in the school setting. Also, the student's background information of being identified as a student that required special education services in the school setting. The student's educational experience of being placed in the alternative school setting due to behavioral issues in the traditional school setting and their experience of being involved in a service learning project while placed in the alternative school setting.
You are being asked to take part because you have been identified as a student that participated in the Response to Intervention Model (RTI) where you received instructional and/or behavioral interventions to determine if you required special education services, currently have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), previously or currently placed in the alternative school setting due to behavioral reasons, and while placed in the alternative school setting participated in a service learning project.
What am I being asked to do?
If you decide to be in the study, I will review and collect data on personal information which includes educational interventions implemented through the Response to Intervention Model (RTI), your initial special education placement, behavior referrals from the traditional school setting, and the reason you were placed in the alternative school environment. I will interview you 2 times during an eight week period for approximately 1 hour and thirty minutes each time I meet with you. During the individual interview I will ask you 10 open ended questions about your educational experience in the alternative school setting. An example of one of the questions

is: How do you feel about the process of being placed in the alternative school? You are also being asked to participate in 2 focus group interviews that will include another peer that you attended alternative school with; I will ask you and the peer 6 open ended questions about participating in the service learning project at the alternative school. Each focus group session should last between 30 minutes to1 hour. An example of one of the questions is: Do you think your experience changed your motivation to do better in school? How? Why? Or Why not? After each individual interview session and focus group session I will ask you to record your reflections about 12 open ended questions on an audio visual device that you can use the visual camera or place face down to record only your voice for about 15 minutes 3 times in 1 week timeframe to discuss what you see in your future after graduating from high school. An example of one of the questions is: What do you think your life will be like once you leave high school? The total time for individual interviews will be approximately 3 hours over an 8 week period of time, the total time for focus group interviews will be approximately 1 to 2 hours over an 8 week period of time, and the audio visually reflections will total between 30 minutes to 45 minutes long over a 1 week period of time. No other individuals will be included in the recordings, participants will only record themselves.

 If at any time during the interviews you wish for the researcher to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know and we will stop. You do not have to answer any question that you don't want to answer in any of the interview sessions. Some of the educational records I will be viewing may include medical diagnosis or health related information but this information will not be included in the study. I will be gathering information from your academic records like in what grade you began receiving interventions to help with academic and behavioral concerns, what academic area you needed additional support in (reading, math, writing, or behavior), what interventions were used to support you in the classroom, and when you were placed in special education along with what eligibility category were you identified in. I will look at your behavioral records to document how many office referrals you have received, what behaviors you displayed in the classroom, if you have been suspended from school along with what behavioral interventions have been put in place in the traditional school setting, and what behavior got you placed in the alternative school setting.

What are the benefits to me for taking part in the study?
If you take part in this study, you might see how much improvement you have made in the educational setting over the past few years in order to have made as far as you have.
The study allows educator's, administrators, and school personal information based on the student's voice of their experience being identified as a student with a disability through the RTI model, placed in alternative school environment, and how the implementation of service learning can help students build characteristics of resiliency in the educational setting.
Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?
The potential risks of taking part in this study is that you will be discussing experiences in your life that may cause you to feel emotions associated with stress or discomfort about being identified as a student with disabilities and discussing behavioral incidents that occurred in your past. If during the interview you feel uncomfortable with the questions and wish to stop the interview I will not precede with any further questions without your permission. If at any time during the interview you feel you need to speak with a counselor then the counselor from the school will be available to talk with you. There may be some questions you feel sensitive about answering but you are allowed to refuse to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable

with discussing. There is a risk that if you share information associated with abuse toward others or toward yourself that I am a mandatory reporter and am mandated by law to report such issues to the counselor or principal of the school.

Will my information be kept private?
Name of the participant's school and participants will be pseudonyms. The participant's names and any identifiable information will not be written on the document analysis forms. During the face to face interviews the participants will participate in private conversations with the researcher in a separate room in the school building. When participants are in the focus group interview they will be asked not to discuss any of the information outside of the interviewing session in order to protect the other participant's identity. Transcriptions from the interviews and document analysis will be kept on a password protected laptop computer that the researcher keeps in a secure location locked in a filing cabinet with the key located in a separate location. After the participants use the audio visual recordings devices the content from the device will be transcribed in Atlas ti on the researcher personal lab top that is protected by a private log in and password and kept in a locked filing cabinet with the key located in a separate location. The audio visual devices will be placed in the locked filing cabinet with the key located in a separate location. All transcripts, document analysis forms, audio/visual recordings will be deleted by July, 31 2016 from the researcher's personal lab top, and signed consent forms will be saved in researcher's locked office filing cabinet for three years.

I will be the only researcher to have access to the data collected along with my dissertation committee from Kennesaw state University and Kennesaw's Institutional Review Board (IRB). As discussed above this study does involve the audio and visual recording of the participants voice and face but all Flip cameras TM and recorded information will be protected in a secure filing cabinet with a key lock with the key being stored in a separate location.

When I tell other people or write articles about what I learned in the study, I won't include the participants name and identifiable information.

The consent forms for this study will be kept for _3_ years in a locked secure cabinet.

Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?
There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study.
You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for taking part in this study.

What are my rights as a research study volunteer?
Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to be a part of this study if you don't want to. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part and no one will be upset or angry at you. You may choose not to answer any questions you don't want to answer, and you can change your mind and not be in the study at any time.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation
I will select six participants from one rural alternative high school in the southeast United States (six African American students with disabilities). The student participants will meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) Found eligible for special education services through the RTI model (b) currently placed in the alternative school setting or within the last school year and (3) while enrolled in alternative school participated in service learning (4) is willing to participate in the study, which includes reviewing individual interview transcriptions (5) participants are between the age of 14 to 18.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions at any time, you can ask the researcher and you can talk to your parent about the study. We will give you a copy of this form to keep. If you want to ask us questions about the study, call or email

Cherry Stanard   678-850-0448 and cherry.stanard@cowetaschools.net

The Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed this study to make sure that the rights and safety of people who take part in the study are protected. If you have questions about your rights in the study, or you are unhappy about something that happens to you in the study, you can contact them at (678) 797-2268 or irb@kennesaw.edu.

What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns
- The researcher has answered your questions and concerns
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.
- The documented educational disability is more of a behavioral disability than an intellectual disability.

Statement of Consent

I give my voluntary consent to take part in this study. I will be given a copy of this consent document for my records.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Printed Name of Participant

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect. I certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and potential risks of participation. I also certify that he or she:

- Speaks the language used to explain this research
- Reads well enough to understand this form or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her
- Does not have any problems that could make it hard to understand what it means to take part in this research.

_____

Name of parent who gave consent for child to participate

_____   _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix H

<div style="text-align:center">

SIGNED CONSENT FORM
</div>

Study Title: The Trajectory of Lived Experiences of African American Students with Disabilities at an Alternative School Setting

Researchers:

My name is Cherry Stanard I am from Kennesaw State University. I am inviting you to take part in a research study. Your parent(s) know we are talking with you about the study, but it is up to you to decide if you want to be in the study. This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to take part in it.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of the study is to help us learn about how African American students with disabilities in alternative schools make sense of their lived experience. Lived experiences can be defined in this study as the student's experiences in the educational setting such as being identified as an "at-risk" student during their elementary years of education and being provided academic and or behavioral intervention to assist them with deficit areas in the school setting. Also, the student's background information of being identified as a student that required special education services in the school setting. The student's educational experience of being placed in the alternative school setting due to behavioral issues in the traditional school setting and their experience of being involved in a service learning project while placed in the alternative school setting.

You are being asked to take part because you have been identified as a student that participated in the Response to Intervention Model (RTI) where you received instructional and/or behavioral interventions to determine if you required special education services, currently have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), previously or currently placed in the alternative school setting due to behavioral reasons, and while placed in the alternative school setting participated in a service learning project.

What am I being asked to do?

If you decide to be in the study, I will review and collect data on personal information which includes educational interventions implemented through the Response to Intervention Model (RTI), your initial special education placement, behavior referrals from the traditional school setting, and the reason you were placed in the alternative school environment. I will interview you 2 times during an eight week period for approximately 1 hour and thirty minutes each time I meet with you. During the individual interview I will ask you 10 open ended questions about your educational experience in the alternative school setting. An example of one of the questions is: How do you feel about the process of being placed in the alternative school? You are also being asked to participate in 2 focus group interviews that will include another peer that you attended alternative school with; I will ask you and the peer 6 open ended questions about participating in the service learning project at the alternative school. Each focus group session should last between 30 minutes to1 hour. An example of one of the questions is: Do you think your experience changed your motivation to do better in school? How? Why? Or Why not? After each individual interview session and focus group session I will ask you to record your reflections about 12 open ended questions on an audio visual device that you can use the visual camera or place face down to record only your voice for about 15 minutes 3 times in 1 week timeframe to discuss what you see in your future after graduating from high school. An example of one of the questions is: What do you think your life will be like once you leave high school?

The total time for individual interviews will be approximately 3 hours over an 8 week period of time, the total time for focus group interviews will be approximately 1 to 2 hours over an 8 week period of time, and the audio visually reflections will total between 30 minutes to 45 minutes long over a 1 week period of time. No other individuals will be included in the recordings, participants will only record themselves.

If at any time during the interviews you wish for the researcher to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know and we will stop. You do not have to answer any question that you don't want to answer in any of the interview sessions. Some of the educational records I will be viewing may include medical diagnosis or health related information but this information will not be included in the study. I will be gathering information from your academic records like in what grade you began receiving interventions to help with academic and behavioral concerns, what academic area you needed additional support in (reading, math, writing, or behavior), what interventions were used to support you in the classroom, and when you were placed in special education along with what eligibility category were you identified in. I will look at your behavioral records to document how many office referrals you have received, what behaviors you displayed in the classroom, if you have been suspended from school along with what behavioral interventions have been put in place in the traditional school setting, and what behavior got you placed in the alternative school setting.

What are the benefits to me for taking part in the study?
If you take part in this study, you might see how much improvement you have made in the educational setting over the past few years in order to have made as far as you have.

The study allows educator's, administrators, and school personal information based on the student's voice of their experience being identified as a student with a disability through the RTI model, placed in alternative school environment, and how the implementation of service learning can help students build characteristics of resiliency in the educational setting.

Are there any risks to me if I am in this study?
The potential risks of taking part in this study is that you will be discussing experiences in your life that may cause you to feel emotions associated with stress or discomfort about being identified as a student with disabilities and discussing behavioral incidents that occurred in your past. If during the interview you feel uncomfortable with the questions and wish to stop the interview I will not precede with any further questions without your permission. If at any time during the interview you feel you need to speak with a counselor then the counselor from the school will be available to talk with you. There may be some questions you feel sensitive about answering but you are allowed to refuse to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with discussing. There is a risk that if you share information associated with abuse toward others or toward yourself that I am a mandatory reporter and am mandated by law to report such issues to the counselor or principal of the school.

Will my information be kept private?
Name of the participant's school and participants will be pseudonyms. The participant's names and any identifiable information will not be written on the document analysis forms. During the face to face interviews the participants will participate in private conversations with the researcher in a separate room in the school building. When participants are in the focus group interview they will be asked not to discuss any of the information outside of the interviewing session in order to protect the other participant's identity. Transcriptions from the interviews and document analysis will be kept on a password protected laptop computer that the researcher keeps in a secure location locked in a filing cabinet with the key located in a separate location.

After the participants use the audio visual recordings devices the content from the device will be transcribed in Atlas ti on the researcher personal lab top that is protected by a private log in and password and kept in a locked filing cabinet with the key located in a separate location. The audio visual devices will be placed in the locked filing cabinet with the key located in a separate location. All transcripts, document analysis forms, audio/visual recordings will be deleted by July, 31 2016 from the researcher's personal lab top, and signed consent forms will be saved in researcher's locked office filing cabinet for three years.

I will be the only researcher to have access to the data collected along with my dissertation committee from Kennesaw state University and Kennesaw's Institutional Review Board (IRB). As discussed above this study does involve the audio and visual recording of the participants voice and face but all Flip cameras TM and recorded information will be protected in a secure filing cabinet with a key lock with the key being stored in a separate location. The consent forms for this study will be kept for _3_ years in a locked secure cabinet.

Are there any costs or payments for being in this study?

There will be no costs to you for taking part in this study.

You will not receive money or any other form of compensation for taking part in this study.

What are my rights as a research study volunteer?

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You do not have to be a part of this study if you don't want to. There will be no penalty to you if you choose not to take part and no one will be upset or angry at you. You may choose not to answer any questions you don't want to answer, and you can change your mind and not be in the study at any time.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation

I will select six participants from one rural alternative high school in the southeast United States (six African American students with disabilities). The student participants will meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) Found eligible for special education services through the RTI model (b) currently placed in the alternative school setting or within the last school year and (3) while enrolled in alternative school participated in service learning (4) is willing to participate in the study, which includes reviewing individual interview transcriptions (5) participants are between the age of 14 to 18.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions at any time, you can ask the researcher and you can talk to your parent about the study. We will give you a copy of this form to keep. If you want to ask us questions about the study, call or email

      Cherry Stanard   678-850-0449 and cherry.stanard@cowetaschools.net

The Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed this study to make sure that the rights and safety of people who take part in the study are protected. If you have questions about your rights in the study, or you are unhappy about something that happens to you in the study, you can contact them at (678) 797-2268 or irb@kennesaw.edu.

What does my signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that:

- You understand the information given to you in this form
- You have been able to ask the researcher questions and state any concerns
- The researcher has answered your questions and concerns
- You believe you understand the research study and the potential benefits and risks that are involved.

- The documented educational disability is more of a behavioral disability than an intellectual disability.

Statement of Consent

I give my voluntary consent to take part in this study. I will be given a copy of this consent document for my records.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Printed Name of Participant

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect. I certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he or she understands the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and potential risks of participation. I also certify that he or she:

- Speaks the language used to explain this research
- Reads well enough to understand this form or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her
- Does not have any problems that could make it hard to understand what it means to take part in this research.

_____

Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Appendix I

HIPAA MEDICAL AUTHORIZATION FORM

I, _____, hereby authorize _____

  (Name of Parent/Guardian))   (Researchers Name)

To view any protected health information only if health information is present in

_____

          (Name of Child)

Educational Records.

The protected health information will be disclosed upon request for the following purposes [please name and explain each purpose]:__Educational Research___. No medical information will be used in the current study but while viewing the student's records the researcher may be exposed to protected health information.

I understand that I have the right to revoke this authorization, in writing, at any time by sending such written notification to _____.

[Researchers Name]

I also understand that my revocation is not effective to the extent that the persons I have authorized to use and/or disclose my protected health information have acted in reliance upon this authorization.

I understand that information used or disclosed pursuant to this authorization may be subject to disclosure by the recipient and no longer protected by federal laws and regulations regarding the privacy of my protected health information.

This authorization expires on [please list a specific date or event]:___July 31, 2016_.

I certify that I have received a copy of this authorization.

_____   Date: _____
Signature of Parent or Guardian
_____
Name of Parent or Guardian
_____
Description of Guardian's Authority (if applicable)

Appendix J

John's story. When interviewed, John was 18 almost 19 years old and in the last few months of his 12th grade year. He was a reserved, African American young man with shoulder length dreads and a slim build. He had tattoos on both arms. One tattoo of his mother's name and another tattoo that said faith, love, hope. He had a cross on one arm and his uncle's name with the date he was born and the date he died. This tattoo of his uncle's name was a dedication because John's uncle had always showed John between right and wrong when he was growing up and his uncle had always been there for him when he needed him. John was well mannered and frequently replied to the questions as yes ma'am or no ma'am. When asked how he described himself John replied, "I describe myself as confident, positive, and put my mind to anything that you want to be." John chose to attend the alternative school program in hopes that he could recover lost credits and graduate on time. This is his story:

Since I was in 1st grade, 2nd grade I remember taking naps, reading, coloring, reading books. The teacher would sit in the middle of the floor and she would read us books stuff like that. I use to always get into trouble in elementary school and middle school. Well, I really just started to slow down in high school but in middle school and elementary school I was always in trouble. Getting in trouble. Just trying to be the class clown and trying to make everybody laugh. Try to be the funniest and stuff like that.

When asked if he ever struggled academically, John replied:

Uh yea, um the hardest was probably reading. I had individual reading class like there were like three or four people and like 6 groups and everyone would just take turns reading and we would help each other out and sound the words out and stuff. When I was younger I felt like this ain't going to help me but when I got older I realized it did help me in the long run.

When John was asked if he had been retained in school he replied:

Yea when I was young I think I was in kindergarten and then the 3rd grade so I was older than the other kids in the class. John sometimes enjoyed going to school and sometimes he didn't. Cause, I didn't like getting up early in the morning and getting ready for school. I did my work cause my mom use to whoop me then so I had no choose but too and the more I got older she would try to talk to me and try to see how we can fix it and see what the problem is because my daddy was not in my life most of my childhood. I know him now but he was in prison when I was born or he was in prison before I was born so he just really

came back into my life. They had put me on uh Concerta to help me focus. When I didn't take it had me hyper and when I did take it had me focused and settled down. Hush up and not talk to nobody. I be doing my work. Um, it was alright sometimes and sometimes it wasn't cause when I took it I didn't want to eat I like didn't eat that whole day. I didn't have no appetite to eat or I didn't want to come outside to play with my friends I would just sit in my room and look at TV or something.

I going to say the most trouble I got into was in 7th or 8th grade. I would say my 10th grade year, my 9th grade year was ok it was mainly my 10th grade year. Well, 10th grade I use to try to be the class clown um causing at the teachers and just doing stuff just to do it.

When asked if John got along with any of his teachers he replied:

Uh some of them but most of them I didn't because of the way they use to talk to me and the way they use to try to do things and stuff like that. Um when the other teachers wouldn't be with me the teachers I liked would be on my side saying you got to stay focused and be positive and stuff like that when the other teachers were against me telling me I wasn't going to graduate and stuff like that. When we be going to school I be like I'm not doing nothing today so I just go in the class and put my head down and go to sleep and not do no work or some teachers would just write me or send me down to the front office cause I wasn't doing my work. I wasn't really doing my work and when they ask to I told them no and I kept talking back and disrupting the class and keeping other students from doing their work. I was talking to them they was talking back and not doing their work and laughing and then joking around. When I was telling them jokes and the teacher just be like just stop talking because you distracting and I just kept on doing it. Not staying up in class, not doing none of my work, and my grades were just dropping they were just giving me 0's in the classroom. The more trouble I get in the more I was out of school and the more I was failing. If I go back right now I know for a fact that I won't be going to school and I won't be focused and I get distracted easily. They give us a lot of work and when I was the base school and just the classroom gets to be so full like 20 to 25 that sometimes there be like one teacher and it is like everybody need help and everybody need help on something and it's like she can't come around or he can't come around and help everybody because he was trying to help other people and by the time and by that time the bell probably be ringing and you still couldn't get no help and they be like oh do it for homework and you don't know what to do because you didn't get no help. I think I probably still be failing at the base school. Well I going to say I probably wouldn't if I'm the way I am now I probably not going to catch up, I'm not going to be graduating this year and I gonna have to graduate next year.

It started 11th grade like when we like at the beginning of the 11th grade so my 9th grade and 10th grade year I did good until I got to 11th grade. My 9th grade

year I liked it but then my 10th grade year and my 11th grade year that is when I well my 11th grade that's when I started falling down and failing all of my classes that is when I just came over here. At first I didn't but now that I realize that I did deserve it because I wasn't doing nothing and I was distracting other people from doing their work. I am getting older now so I'm opening up my eyes now and I think clearly but when I was their age I was thinking and saying the same way. They was coming here and not doing nothing and not doing no work and just sit here and do nothing and now the more you get older the more you think about what I'm going to do if I don't graduate and how am I going to be supporting my family and stuff like that if I don't graduate.

When asked if he would you have stayed in school until he was 21 years old? John replied:

> Probably not.

> Well, when I was at the base school my brain I was just giving up like I was giving up on school and I was doing nothing except going to the classroom and putting my head down and just sleep like I didn't do no kind of work. Then I just started failing and I got into more kindda trouble so they started sending me home and then they suggested to send me here like to get caught up and catch up or whatever so me and momma talked about it and we made the decision to come here. I wanted to come to alternative school because I was failing in the public school and I was getting distracted in class and wasn't doing my work and stayed getting in trouble so me and my mommy agreed to come to here and see how I do in school and be in smaller classes and see if I can focus better and whatever. Before I came here and before my 11th grade year I was having all Fs. I was failing all of my classes. I think I just fell off and I had to get back on track. I had heard a couple of my friends were talking about it and see I was already failing classes so then I was talking to my friends about it and they were like you need to go because they will help you graduate faster and you will get your credit back and get your classes done faster. So I went home and talk to my momma about it and so we just had a meeting about it and they decided to just bring me over here so they can catch me back up so I can graduate on time. When I came home and told my momma about it and she seen I was really trying to go so she put herself in it and she was like if I do this you just can't let me down and she was like if I do this I don't want you to let me down and I want you to go all the way through and do what you got to do to finish school and I was like yes mam. Uh when I was at the base school I was like 4 or 5 credits behind. Um it took me I think a semester to a year to catch up. Um I got back focused and I realized then it's no joke any more it's time to catch up and do your work and do what you got to do and focus and get my diploma so I can do what everybody else is doing and show everyone that said I wasn't going to make it and graduate. Now I feel about it is that everyone needs their education so they can get somewhere in life because if you don't have an education then you no better and not do nothing with your life and you not going to be able to get no job well no good job that makes good money or whatever. It played a big role because like I feel like they did not have to accept me and they didn't have to do it but I really appreciate that they did because they gave me a chance to prove myself that I can do it and that I can get

um get my classes done and graduate on time. Um try to show my daughter and my little cousin from right from wrong. Um and make sure they don't make the same mistakes as their mother did and I did and make sure they on their grade and make sure they in school just as well as I am to finish and do something with their life.

When asked the question, when you came over to alternative school was your parent always involved in your life? John replied:

> My mother, yes cause she has shown me from right and wrong, what mistakes to do and not to do and help me with advice on stuff because she was always playing momma and daddy. At first I was like I didn't like it and then the more I came I was like yay I like this I came I like it now cause I'm doing my work now and I'm focused on my work.

> Being in a smaller class with like 3 or 4 other kids and not having my phone out bringing some stuff to class or school and being more well having more lead way of doing stuff. By you being in that smaller classroom you can focus better and you are able to get more work done like you are supposed to but that is just for me how I feel because being in a smaller classroom helps me to focus better and do my work. Mostly I do my work on the computer and I just go to a computer do my work and just sit there. What I am seeing is on the computer um the science is the best class to have because it is way easy it is real easy then being in the classroom. Um what else easy I gonna say social studies it is in between it is a little hard and a little easy sometimes one subject will be easy and then the next subject might be hard and now I gonna say but I not gonna say math because I have never had math on the computer. Uh everything got better like I stopped getting into trouble, I started focusing more doing my work and passing my classes. It took me the semester of my 11th grade year and now and now I am all caught up now. I feel great I feel good about it. I will graduate in May. I liked that most of our time were not in school all day like the base school we go from like 7:00 to 4 because that is like most of your day. I know most kids don't like being in school for no 7 or 8 hours. And stuff so that's why I say I like coming here because I don't like being in school for 7 or 8 hours like because it takes up most of your time or all that time. It not really too much workload besides just focusing and doing your work really. I just recently switched over to afternoon classes at the end no at the beginning of this year. It is good for me because I like it quiet with less people. It is quiet and I can focus better. The morning class is when everyone get in trouble afternoon class for people who bad but I ain't bad so

When asked about participating in the service learning project at alternative school John replied:

> It was sort of like a school thing that they made classes come in and showed it to them and made the time for us to watch the video. Actually my sister was doing it at first and then she told me about it and then I just tried and see how I liked it. She was just doing it and she brought it to my attention. I remember this

lady gave up her whole life and everything just to move to what was it South what was it South Africa. Yea, Uganda so they can help the people out and help them out and take care of them. I felt like they really cared and they really cared and tried to help people out and stuff. Somewhat it just opened my eyes to try to help other people just because they might be far away from me that just doesn't mean they don't need help. Well I was cutting up pants and sending them out so we could help the kids with shoes. Everyone had the foot virus or something I forgot what it was called a foot fungus. What I felt about it is knowing that I am helping others other kids and stuff like that. Like the other day a man just walked up on me and he asked me for a couple of dollars and I had gave it to him. Um I would tell people about it and have them look at the video and have them see if they are interested in doing it and see what they say but I don't want them to do something that they don't want to do.

My main goal when I first went to my base school was to get done with school and finish it so I can make my momma and my family proud. Cause I be the second person in my whole family to graduate from school. I can make everyone happy and proud, my uncles, my aunties, my sisters, my dad, my grandma and that is mainly it.

When asked if John's mother and father finished school he replied:

No ma'am, they work my mom actually my momma in school now about to get her GED and stuff and my dad works for a pest control service and I think he is trying to go get his GED but I am not for sure. My main point of high school is to prove my other family wrong cause they was saying that I was not going to graduate and that I'm not going to make it and stuff. That is what convinced me to keep going so I can prove them wrong so that when I do it I can throw it up in their face and stuff and so then I can get somewhere in life and be something in life so I can give to my daughter. My plans for my future is going to the navy and doing something with my life instead of being out here on the streets and not doing nothing. Um out here on the streets mean like you all outside with your friends selling drugs, doing illegal things what illegal things that you not supposed to be doing so you can get money and stuff. And well I hope my life be wonderful, sensatiable, so I can give to my little daughter and take care of her and show her from right and wrong. And yes I do have goals my goals are my goals is my goals for my life are going to the navy and being successful and doing things for my daughter and get whatever she needs and whatever she wants to my daughter so when she ask I just can get it for her and not be like how much is this and how much is this and she just be able to get it. My goals is to go to the navy and being successful and traveling all over the world because you only live once. Uh I define success as you accomplish what you said you was going to accomplish or your goal that you said you were going to do and that's really what it is. What I think about my future is how I am going to do it and when I'm going to do it and how it is going to affect me and my family and when I finish school and I will have to be in the real world and I got to do what I got to do. And yes I

do have goals for my life after I finish high school and my goals is going to the navy. And my plans of reaching that goal is going and researching about the navy and researching about what I want to do and what I want to know and talking to somebody so I can get signed up for the navy. And I would think about it through the night. What would keep me from reaching my goals probably my family because they don't want me going into the navy. How can I reach my goals is staying focused, keep pushing and don't let nothing district me and come in my way or something bring me down to the point where I don't want to do it no more. When I think about my future is when I think about my future what is most important to me is my little girl and to make sure she is OK and make sure she is fine and have everything that she needs and that she has everything that she wants because when I was growing up I didn't really get what I wanted. My biggest influence is my mother, my father, um my little girl. They influence me cause my momma always tell me if you put your mind to it you can do it. She always be the one that always say don't worry about what everybody else think do what you do and you know you do what you want to do in life but you gotta put your mind to it. And my little girl has impacted me because it keeps me focused and knowing that she needs she needs stuff so it keeps me focused and get her what she needs. Um the tools that I think will probably help me in the long run is school um what I learned in school um and how I learned it and what I have learned from family and other people. What I need most to reach my goals is my mother so she can keep me focused and have my confidence up so I can move to the navy.

In May John is scheduled to graduate on time at the age of 18. He will be the second individual in his family to have obtained a high school diploma.

_____

PJ's story. PJ is 18 and will be 19 in September in the 12th grade. She was a reserved African American young lady that hesitated when answering the interview questions in the beginning but by the second interview session she was very relaxed and comfortable in talking about her educational experiences. She is an individual that must first get to know someone before opening up to them. She said several times during the interview session "Oh, I forgot we were recording this". PJ has long black hair and tended to wear it down around her face. She can be seen as an intimidating individual until you begin to speak with her. She would answer the questions in a short but direct manner almost as if interviewing for a job. She would pause and think about her responses that best articulated her thought processes. When asked to describe herself PJ replied, Um I am laid back, fun, outgoing, social, I guess how you say it. PJ had difficulty regularly attending school and on several occasions would skip school. PJ found herself falling behind in her classes during her 11th grade year and chose to attend the alternative school program to recover lost credits in order to graduate on time. This is her story:

> Kindergarten was fun we did a lot of count to ten in Spanish in kindergarten. I remember learning a lot of stuff in kindergarten. Its straight I don't know it was just school to me then. Now in second grade it was fun. My teacher took me to the zoo. She took me to the zoo cause she was my favorite teacher and

she was moving so that is why she took me to the zoo because she was moving. Her name was Ms. Cole I think she teaches at another school now I am not sure. I liked her. She was a teacher that doesn't necessarily like act as she is a teacher but acts I guess as like a mentor. She would just help me out doing projects and stuff. Like she would pull me out of class and work on projects.

When asked, do you remember when you were in 1st or 2nd grade anything being harder for you? PJ replied,

Reading was probably harder for me. Um everything was always read to me and I didn't like doing my homework. They broke everything down like into simple forms. In 3rd grade, I got in trouble a lot for talking and we had like the little red cards and green cards so I pulled the card for talking all the time because I met new friends there. I was pulled out my whole elementary and uh middle school. Yea I was pulled out for reading and yea reading and vocabulary words. My 6th grade year it was fun. I got in trouble a lot for talking. I just like talking so um I got in trouble a lot so I went to ISS a lot for talking. It was like hush or we going to send you out the room, we going to send you out the room. I just couldn't help myself. I just like to talk. 7th grade, I loved math in 7th grade. I didn't really have to think much it was easy to me. 7th grade I didn't have two teachers. 8th grade I had two teachers um Language Arts um every class. I think it is called pull out and well I passed the writing test. Oh 8th grade year I passed everything but science and I was points away from that. Mrs. Steep in middle school, she was my case manager. Um she pulled me out of class and she worked on a lot of stuff with me.

Well 9th grade it was something new because I had never been to high school it was being around different people so it was like a field trip instead of school doing something new. I was excited to go to high school it is way different from middle school because you get to have more options of choosing the classes and picking your classes. I wanted to have fun, I just wanted to have fun. I really wasn't concerned about school and stuff. I would just party with people my age. Um 10th grade I didn't have any trouble with the math 9th grade I really didn't have any trouble with the math. Probably, like up into my 11th grade that is when I began to struggle with the math cause it gets real, real complicated. My 10th grade year half the day I went to a Career Based School so I was at the Career school and my base school. My 11th grade I was going to be at the Career school all day and I guess that is why is because I was there the whole day. I took communications. I took first responder, I took science, health care to science, and I took world history and I think that was about it. The days I went to school I did my work and like I think my favorite subject was history so I like never I think I was passing history. A, B I think 89 I think that was my biggest strength was history. I did well in Spanish I made like an 86 in Spanish. The thing is with the attendance they um take off like 2 points everyday if you miss or if you are late to class and my grandma had bought me a car a couple of months after I had turned 16 so I think right there was like a big, big, big distraction, I guess. I probably

missed two days out the week and the rest of the days I be late. I could go anywhere but I had to be back at 12:00 because the law. I didn't want my license to get took because if you got pulled over its like if they saw you were only 16 they could take your license. That year I failed, one, two, three. Three classes, Math 1, um World History and Physical Science. I was talking or asleep or didn't pay attention. World History, I took it at the career based school so uh when you were a minute late you a minute late they take off two points. I was an outgoing student, a good student that didn't want to come to school. I didn't like getting up.

When asked, did your parents ever find out about you not being at school? PJ replied:

> They called my grandma. I would have to hear her give me a lecture all that it was wrong and they threatened to take my car because they want me to graduate and be successful.

> I had gone to summer school and I had to take math over on the computer I took um literature recovery class at the base school in the afternoons so I had token computer classes before. I am probably 3 points away from passing it but I would never pass it. When it comes to 11th and 12th grade classes they become more difficult and more complex.

When asked, did you ever think about dropping out of school? PJ replied:

> Yea, one time cause, I wanted to drop out and go get my GED. It was just I was getting tired. I just felt like I was just never, never, ever going to finish school so I guess it was just impatience.
> My mom finished school after she had me she went back to school and my dad I think he went to ah vocational school or something like that. I was spoiled. I had any and everything I wanted. It was like I was the only child. My grandparents my grandma on my dad's side she dropped out when she was in 12th grade and my granddad he went to school but I think he dropped out and my other grandparents they dropped out and my mom's dad died when she was two so I didn't know him. My mom works at a car factory and my dad works at a plant outside of town he works there. And my grandma she doesn't work and my granddad he retired from an airline company. Sometimes my dad works seven days and my mom she works sometimes she works six or seven days. When I went out to look for jobs and they was like the requirements are a diploma or a GED. You get older you start to think more everything is out of perspective of life change like when you get older and then I don't know because I don't know when you start working you start to buy stuff and um stuff like that I don't know I guess it is just competition that leads. I wanted to work any job that is not a fast food job. I work from 40 to 56 hours per week. I just woke up and went to school and ah I use to work 7 days a week and sometimes I do work 7 days a week so on the weekends it doesn't really bother me. The weekdays I work 40 and then Saturday and Sunday that is 16 it is 8 hour shifts. I got off at 12:30 at night so I went to sleep at like 1:30. I don't like working at a warehouse. I don't like working at that

warehouse because it is boring. Working in a warehouse like when you just have a job you can get a job at any business but with a career you can lose your job in a career but 9 times out of 10 that would not happen because there is such a demand.

I was behind on my credits, probably 4 credits and I wasn't going to school so they gave me the alternative of coming here or not graduating on time at my base school. I probably graduated class of 17 or 18. I know I would have gotten back in school eventually but I would have been 20 or 21 when I graduated. Mr. Gordon, I guess, he was the principal at the base school said you can either come here or you can stay at the base school. I was not taking school seriously like I should so they offered me like you can go to the alternative school or you can stay at the base school so I choose to go because you know you only be there for like four hours and you get to go home and they didn't count seat time.

When asked how do you catch up on your credits? PJ replied:

I made them up Math 1 during summer school, I made World History up here and I made Physical Science up here at alternative school. I got ahead, I liked that and we use to be able to listen to music but they have blocked everything now. Oh yes it is working for me because I want to graduate but some people they just need a boost. I think alternative school is more of a laid back situation then the base school. It was at your own pace. It is a smaller environment. Um I think the nice teachers are over here some teachers are I look at why are you here but really there are not really any mean teachers over here. Well my favorite teacher here was Mrs. Green but she moved. I am so mad at her for moving. She was like cool. Like I guess she is not going to sugar coat anything. Her class was relaxed. Some days I wanted to quit school because the class I did before I just wanted to quit. She um she told me to walk with her and she talked with me about how far along I had done came. I think the teachers are better over here just because they don't have as many students to keep up with like at the base school there is less pressure on them. Base school we got thousands of students that take 4 classes a day versus over here you take 1 class a day and you work on the computer. The computer it can be like a good thing to uh to a person but it can also be like a bad thing because they can get on other sites and not be focused in their class.

When asked, how long did it take you to catch up with all that? PJ replied:

Couple probably 5 months. I would not have been able to graduate this year if I stayed at the base school. We take the computer classes online so we finish them and we get another class so it took a semester to catch up.

When asked about participating in the Service Learning in the alternative school. PJ replied:
Well we watched a video about the people in Uganda about the issues with the parasites I think they are called parasites. They called classes in to watch the

video on the foundation so I think pretty much everyone in the school saw it. It was volunteer work they didn't make you do it if you wanted to you could. The name of the bug is called jiggers so what the jigger does is the children of Uganda they don't have any shoes and they walk around and run around and they dig in their feet and it is really, really, painful to walk on and then stuff like that. And this couple from the United States they heard about it and they sold everything and they moved to Uganda and they started the foundation. I forgot her name but she said it really moved her, it was like her job to help others when she had everything over here. She had like the perfect life over here and when she did she was pregnant at the time and they sold their house, their car, everything and they moved to Uganda. I don't feel like I could do that but I feel like that was very, very, very generous and thoughtful. It made me feel like I had it easy like my life was easy compared to them um like I have everything I wanted and they didn't even have shoes to put on their feet and I have 20 pairs of shoes to put on my feet so it made me really look to see how much I really have. I don't think they really have education over there so. Um a free education um being safe um not worried about bugs crawling on my feet. It made me value more of what I have. I wanted to help them because these little kids to get the jiggers out they take safety pins and they have to dig in their feet and like I don't like to see people cry so they were crying because it hurt their feet. Everybody needs something at one point in time and let's say you're in a predicament and you need help and you never help anyone you can't really expect people to help you because you never helped them.

When asked, why you would want to help other people in the world? PJ replied:

Um I don't know cause third world countries and stuff like that its really, really, hard to try to help because everybody is in need. It was mainly on Fridays but a lot of people helped. People in our school they brought old jeans and we started to cut the pieces out of the jeans to make the shoes and we sent them off. You can either do cutting or tracing and I did both.

When asked, was that they first time you were ever exposed to 3rd world countries? PJ replied:

I mean no they have commercials on TV that when I see it I turn it because I don't like watching stuff like that like with the dogs and stuff like that. I don't like watching stuff like that so I just turn it.

When asked, what advice would you have for other students who choose to do service learning? Would you tell them to get involved with it? PJ replied:

I would just tell them to watch the video and they choose whether they want to be a part of it and probably they would if they saw the video because it would get their attention.

Sometimes like now like this semester I wish I had gone back because I would have took the nurse aid course I would have been CNA certified so that probably is the only thing because prom that would have been alright. The only reason I wish I could of gone back to the base school instead of staying because every semester they asked if I wanted to stay or go and I always say I want to stay. I want to stay but um with the nurse it is called a dual enrollment which you're still a high school student but you're a college student also so once you finish that if you go to a 4 year university you will be a sophomore instead of a freshman.

I feel like they should offer like more classes then just like online classes because everyone here is just is not here in like engaged I guess to learn and I can go to class and I think it is mainly the boys the younger boys that be here in 9th grade they just staring at a computer screen they are not learning anything like they are not being taught anything. I don't know it just more career classes rather than just regular electives that they are taking online those are not fun even though it is an alternative school it is you just sitting there like whatever so. You're not allowed to go on the premises of the base school.

I got my first job last year Feb. 2nd at McDonalds and I worked there up until Nov. 18th. We started buying things and you have to keep up with those things. I plan to finish by the end of February and um currently I am working, I work a full time job and I will continue to work and I am moving into my own apartment March the 1st and um I um I plan on starting the nurse class over in August. I will be certified as a CNA. I think about having a good standing career and um being able to accomplish anything I put my mind to and staying focused and standing on my own two feet. I think life will be the same after I graduate I think the same because in August I go right back to school. I think it will be more complicated. Yes, I have goals my goals are to pursue my RN career and um have good credit and um to pay off my car and to be more uh to grow and to grow and become a better person. I plan on staying focused and paying attention so I don't know that came out of nowhere um staying focused and keeping my eyes on the prize. Being lazy would keep me from reaching my goals and not ah getting a big head and getting ahead of myself like I occasionally do. How do you think you can overcome these obstacles? Um thinking positive, being positive, and being around positive people. Being in a career is the most important to me, being able to take care of myself and standing on my own two feet. My grandma and my grandparents on my dad's side have influenced me because they push me and they want to see me do better then what my parents did and what they did. Being motivated and being focused, being honest, and striving for nothing but the best is how I can reach my goals. What do I most need so that I can reach my goals? Motivation and yea motivation.

PJ finished all of her classes prior to the end of the school year in February, three months ahead of the end of the semester. She plans on attending her graduation ceremony in May and walking with her class. She moved into her first apartment on March 1st and continues to work at the factory until she is able to enroll in the CNA nursing program offered by a local college.

Heather's story. When interviewed, Heather was 17 and in 10th grade. She was a tall, lean, and very attractive young lady. She was well dressed with the latest fashionable trends. She had on

large hoop earrings that hung along her dark brown hair past the middle of her neck. She spoke in a lethargic manner as if she really did not care about being interviewed. Heather has had multiple absences during her academic career and is continuously trying to recovery lost credits from failing her classes. When asked how she would describe herself, she replied, Outgoing careful of other people, um caring. Heather was placed in the alternative middle school in 8th grade and placed in the high school alternative school in 10th grade. She continues to have mixed feeling about the alternative school environment but finds herself walking a thin line of being placed in alternative school once again due to her disruptive and disrespectful outburst in the regular school setting. This is her story:

Kindergarten was fun. The only thing I don't remember anything until like 4th grade. I liked my teacher very much. She helped a lot and was caring. It was alright I did track in 4th grade. I don't remember anything in middle school but middle school was kinda hard. The work was different. I was good in 6th grade. I started getting in trouble in 7th grade for little stuff, probably the people that I was around. It's just a whole class full of students, like twenty something I think. I didn't get in trouble so my aunt didn't have to come to any meetings but in 8th grade she did. I had a lot of referrals and I think that's when I had got sent to the alternative middle school for just being talkative. We didn't' have a cafeteria in alternative middle school, we had to eat inside the classroom that's what I remember. I fail one class that year I think it was math it was math.

After leaving alternative middle school and moving up to high school it was different like the classes and the people. The teachers are more strict. They expected more than the middle school did like academically and more assignments. 9th grade first semester I was doing alright and then towards the middle of the school year there was a whole lot of trouble from being with the wrong people. They were the type to like talk back and stuff I guess. I was bad in 9th grade but I never got sent to alternative school but I was close. Probably 9th grade 9th grade was bad. The work started getting harder, the teachers were more strict then in middle school stuff like that. Usually they send me out of class and then come over there and talk to me or just tell me to be quiet. I use to be just bad in 9th grade just like talk back and stuff like that. Civics I got in a lot of trouble in there. I had trouble with one teacher. He was different I guess like I don't know how to explain it. I think it was just the people that were around me and how I interacted with them, me just being social. I either got sent out of the class or sent to ISS or wrote up. When in ISS I sometimes slept and sometimes I did my work it depends on how I was feeling. I passed that class but I failed ah Literature.
9th grade was the year I met Mrs. Hope my Social Skills teacher. She helps a lot and she cares a lot more then what the other teachers do. She will go out of her way to help me get my missing assignments. She teaches me to always try to do my best and she tries to talk to me.

Well, I'm going to say 10th grade, last year was the worst. I wasn't as bad but I was ok. I mean I was doing bad things so I guess I had consequences for

talking back to the teacher, fussing stuff like that. I got suspended for it and I was supposed to get suspended for three days but I was supposed to come back on the second day but that's when the administrators called and said you got a meeting the alternative school. I wasn't proud of myself. I think I had got in some type of trouble and I think they looked at my back ground so I think it was a lot of referrals and discipline and that all. Yea, I understand what I did. My referrals for disruption of class, stuff like that. I can be loud sometimes. I was sent to alternative school in the middle, middle, sometime in the middle hah till the end of the school year. Yea, I thought 3 days of suspension was going to be alright I didn't know I was going to get sent there. At first I was really mad just because it's alternative school and nobody wants to go there. Mr. Pole what's his name he not like the owner but he's like the top over there, he sat there in the meeting just explaining what I had to do, what I had to wear but I forgot his name. I had to wear black khaki with a white collared shirt, no logo, and no tight fitted uh black pants, certain shoes, no earrings. I didn't like it because I couldn't wear my earrings. When I started getting into trouble my aunt would say, she didn't like it, you need to do better so I can graduate, and get a good job. I had thought about dropping out sometimes you know because of my grades but when I went to alternative school I got caught up.

> You got off the school bus and if there wasn't a line you had to step up, take your shoes off, pull your pockets out, turn around and they would scan you up and down. It kindda aggravated me a little bit because I had to do it every day at alternative school. Usually, your class was already eating breakfast or we had to go to another class and wait till the time it was for your class We stayed in one class all day and your day depends on who the teacher was and who was in the class The class that I was in there were like 8 students.

> I passed my classes because they were easier. It wasn't as much assignments as it is at the base school. I think it is better for me to be somewhere small then big. I'm better in small places yea I see I did better over there then at the base school. I can focus, um to stay focused and do what I needed to do. I needed to do my work and focus because I was failing one or two classes. Um it was literature. When I was at alternative school and I caught up there. There was this one teacher but I forgot her name. She helped me um she helped like she was there out of all the other teachers she was just there and she seemed like she cared and she talked to me.

When asked about participating in the service learning project at alternative school. Heather replied:

> It was at the alternative school and basically it was helping the children in Africa. Well, not just the children but also the adults that didn't have shoes. Mrs. Smith my teacher was telling us about it. It is kids and adults in need of shoes and we helped them. They need more stuff then we do. We have clothes, we have shoes, we don't drink out of pans and ah bottles will like those jug bottles. We

have a house, we have food and they don't and that is about it. It was sad and we needed to help more. We met in the library with probably like 10 students. We had a lot of conversations. We spent like 45 minutes to 30 minutes a day just helping people who are in need. We cut out like I don't know jeans there was a certain way you had to make them a certain way so they could fit the bottom of the shoe. We would make them and then ship the shoes off so they could be made more. I think the elementary school was helping. I knew what the little baby shoes would look like. There was a lady that came to video us making the shoes. I learned to be thankful for what you got cause they don't have anything and not to judge off of what you see. Just to help out like show that I cared. It showed me to be more thankful for what I got because just be thankful.

My junior year is ok so far I don't get in much trouble. I don't get in any trouble unless someone put me in it. Like drama just drama people saying stuff and uh and he say she say like what they have going on they put me in it and it has nothing to do with me. I react and then I get in trouble but I just don't pay any attention to it now. I feel like I have matured like the stuff that use to bother me doesn't bother me no more. I like coming to school but just certain days. I like to go to school sometimes but probably miss one to two days per week. I don't stay at home it's like I get checked out or something. My grades are not good so far I have to catch up on a lot of stuff. I am not trying. I was going to try to get right if I get caught up on all my classes and I probably go to summer school to be on the right track to graduate on time. If I pass all my classes this semester and then I go to summer school then I'll be on track. It depends on if I do good this last semester. I'm trying to catch up on all my work. I will 19 when I graduate if I can't graduate on time I think I would go to military school I can just get my high school thing I think, I can't remember.

When I think of the future I think of Um just achieve my goals stay focused and graduate. Have a good life and just achieve my goals and just be me. I was thinking about going into the air force and I have taken the ASVAB before I went to alternative school but I never got my results back I'm not sure but it was like in the other cafeteria and whoever wanted to join went there and took it. The things on paper. I was thinking about being an ultra sound tech. I was going to go to the Learning Center. It's over by the Career School, its where you take your classes on the computer, it's like whatever classes you missed you can catch up on them so you can graduate on time. When I leave high school it will be different because I'm almost grown and I'm going to be kindda on my own so it's going to be different. Yea, I have goals I have a lot of goals. Um to stay focused achieve my goals and be the best I can be really. I plan on Um just staying focused and staying focused that's it. Nothing can keep me from not reaching my goals unless something happens or I get in any trouble I hope I don't but. I can overcome that by um just focus, be me, make my mom proud so. Oh when I think about my future and what's important to you just to make my family happy, make them proud of me, and what goals I have achieved during high school. I like sports. In

order to reach my goals um I need positive people around me to help me to do better and all that I can.

Heather is currently at the end of her 10th grade year and is trying to catch up on her credits so she does not fall further behind in her education.

Brianna's story. Brianna's story is very unique. She had never had even one discipline referral since entering school. She made good grades and tried her hardest to learn what she needed to know to pass her classes. When interviewed, Brianna was 15 years old and in the 10th grade. She was very soft spoken and would answer the interview question with a one to two word response. When asked to describe herself she replied, "Um nice quiet girl that tries to stay focused". This is her story:

> In kindergarten I remember nap time and learning. It was fun. In 2nd grade some stuff was hard like Math and Science. The teachers sat down with me sometimes and helped me to understand it. I remember being pulled out in some grades in elementary school. 3rd grade was hard um starting classes like social studies. The work was hard. In elementary school there was a teacher named Ms. Black um I think speech. We worked on like phonics or something I remember having cards with words and reading them and stuff. I never got in trouble in elementary school. I was never held back in school. 4th grade was also hard um the classes I took like Math. In 5th grade math and social studies were the hardest. I am getting to know math better now. Taking notes and reviewing the work helped. Some teachers they just sat down with me to help me understand what I was doing and had me try to do it myself. In 6th grade some of it was hard but I still tried to keep my grades up by studying and looking over my notes and stuff. I had two teachers in my classes. They sometimes read out the questions and came around and helped us.

When asked**,** if someone reads it out loud does that help you better? Brianna replied:

> Not all the time.

> In 7^{th and} 8th grade I remember math being hard but I did not have to go to summer school. I had an extra class for math in 8th grade. We learned the same thing that we went over in our regular ed. class.

> It was near the end of 9th grade. It was before school had started. One morning I had just got off the bus and I always meet up with my boyfriend and uh and we had like we walked around school like everyone does and like we went to a corner inside the building and I had performed oral sex on him. That was new. A couple, a boy and girl, they had walked in on that while I was doing that. They had walked in and they had just left to go up the stairs and I guess to go get a principal or somebody. We just stood there. I remember me standing there and me seeing the assistant principal walk down and talk to us and go to some office, her office. We had the assistant principal came and sent us to the principal's office and talked with us. We talked. We both sat down and she called one of us at a time. She talked to us and then asked for our parent's numbers to call them to let them know what happened. Then I remember getting in the car with the police officers. I was in the front of the police car. Um I remember the

police officer that I got in the car with he told me to just tell the truth and don't lie. I felt really bad. I was crying afterwards. I went to I think it was the jailhouse downtown and we got out and went inside with the one police officer and we waited for our parents to come and when my mom got there we both went into a room with a person that was there that worked there and we talked about the situation and then my boyfriend he went in there afterwards after we left out and his parents. We just sat like in the hallway with chairs. I was going to get into trouble and not being at my regular school anymore. It was the first time I had been suspended. We had talked to this man that was there and after that the man told us we were going to the alternative high school. And stuff like that. I was at alternative school for 5 months like half a school year. We were going to go to the court house but we didn't ever have to go.

When asked, when they said you were going to alternative what did you think alternative school was going to be like? Brianna replied:

Like jail nothing like regular school. Like a group of kids in one class separated. We would have to take off our jacket and then shoes and belts for them to wand us down to see if we had anything. We would go to our classes. It wasn't going to be like regular school. We had separate classes and ate at different times and things like a small amount of people in the cafeteria. There were six or seven kids in the class. They had different courses. One girl from another school named Shay she would talk to me like every time, we would have the same lunch and breakfast. There were one or two nice teachers at alternative school. They would help me. They would help me whenever I needed help on my work I would ask them. They let me redo test or do test corrections to bring up my grades.

Alternative school starts at 9:00 and you get out at 1:00 or 2:00. I would just go to sleep or watch a movie when I got home. In alternative school the teachers were like different from the teachers here um like I can't describe it. It felt like it went by slow just like a regular day of school. Well at the time I was at I did not want to go there.

I should not have done that and it was very wrong to do. I felt like that wasn't what I was supposed to do. I feel like I shouldn't have ever done that and I trying to learn in school. Well like not having that in my mind to not do that anymore. Like coming back to the base school I remembered what I did and I just have to remember not to do that anymore. My parents sat down and they talked to me about the situation and I told them about what all happened. My mom she took away my phone and made me clean up and everything.

When asked, do you feel like it was necessary for you to be taken away in a police car? Brianna replied:
Yes ma'am.

When asked, have you ever known anybody else that got in trouble for the same thing that you got in trouble for? Brianna replied:
No mam

When asked, do you think they would have gotten into the same trouble you did if they did the same thing? Brianna replied:

Yes mam

When asked**,** how the alternative school presented the service learning project how was it presented to you? Brianna replied:

By presenting it to the whole class how shoes are made and given to the children there. That their feet had some type of disease or something and they and other people came and helped them and gave them shoes that they made. It made me want to help them make shoes. I wanted to help give them food. I wanted to help.

Both of my parents graduated from high school but they did not go to college. My mom is a custodian and my father works at a store building pallets. I think about the positive and doing a whole lot better and not doing anything bad. I thought about going to Career School but I don't know if they have any classes for what I want to do in college. My advisory teacher Mrs. Knight can talk to me about it. High school, it's like positivity, like focusing, writing. I think that it will be much better and I can head toward my goals. I dream of becoming a pediatrician doctor and staying positive. I like children and taking care of children and I like to know like what's into a pediatrician doctor. My old doctor he was very nice and like I always use to say that I wanted to be like him. Like be a doctor I can reach my goals by staying focused and not doing bad things. I will not reach my goals by not staying on track and by doing the wrong and not the right and by not letting anything get in the way of my future. When I think about my future I think what's most important to me is becoming a doctor and what I have been wanting to do ever since I was younger. My family and I guess my mother and aunt are my biggest influences in my life. It help me on doing good in school and everywhere else. I think by learning all I can and focusing. I need good grades um focused mind. Wanting to learn and do everything and graduate on time. Just learning grade by grade.

Brianna is at the end of her 10th grade school year making good grades and staying out of

trouble.

Tavion's story. Tavion has a personality that is contagious with laughter. He can find humor in almost every aspect of life. When asked how old are you? He replied, "Yea, I am 21 no I'm just playing I am 16 and I'm in the 10th grade". When asked to describe himself, he replied, "I don't know I'm a whole lot of stuff I mean I'm funny, obviously I look good because I pull all the bad girls and uh I have a good sense of humor". The reason he choose the pseudonym had a very thought provoking process. He stated, "Oh my God the reason why I choose Tavion is because me and my girlfriend in the future not now but in the future we gonna have some kids and so she was like if we have a boy then what would the boy's name be and so I want it to be my name Tavion so. In the future yea, future means out of college, got a good job, got a house, got a car stuff like that." Tavion has been placed once in middle school and once in high school in the alternative school setting throughout his academic career and continues to try to stay out of trouble but trouble seems to find him. This is his story:

My grandma raised me, my momma gave me away when I was 3 me and my sister and I ain't seen my sister since then.

When asked is your dad involved in your life? Tavion replied:

Uh hah but my momma ain't usually it is vice a versa for other kids but not mine.

I was smart I knew that but I was bad at the same time but I wasn't that bad. I got in trouble on the bus but not in school. First grade I loved math. Math I love math. I don't know I like to add stuff. Well I always like math but I like math but if it gets harder I don't like it. Reading oh know, well we read like in text books we use to do this little thing called popcorn tag you it or something like that or as my teacher called it duck, duck, goose or something like that. It was like it was fun to read with a lot of people then just to read by yourself it's boring.

Third grade I can't remember cause all my teachers helped me in my classes. Like reading I don't know if I got enough before it was in the 5th grade it was that one grade I was trying to go into the 6th grade and it was really just that one grade that was keeping me behind and so I would stay after school and read to get my AR points up and stuff. There was after school tutoring and before school tutoring, it took a whole lot. Oh my God. I remember my 5th grade teacher she helped me pass, she helped me pass the 5th grade so I could go to the 6th grade because I use to have to stay after class and read books and all kinds of stuff like that and that's it I mean. Back then I was like uh in elementary I wasn't staying focused and stuff like that like regular kids. You know like kids that young don't stay focused a lot and yea it just be the classes, it don't be the classes, it be the people in the classes.

When asked, did you have to take any medicine when you were little? Tavion replied:

Yea, I mean yea but I really didn't have to because I know how to control myself, it made me sleepy I just wanted to go to sleep. It was Adderall, when I took the medicine my eyes got watery and I just get sleepy, I thought what the world.

Oh my not in 6th grade but in 7th grade that was when I was getting into trouble. I would have lunch detention and things like that. Ok it was some students in the class breaking crayons and throwing them and stuff like that and that year was the year when I failed the 7th grade cause I was playing too much and got kept be hide. 8th grade that is when I got into trouble.

8th grade was the year that I had gotten into trouble. I didn't really get into any trouble till like I did like with middle school alternative school .Alright the reason why we got in trouble was we had this little click as you want to call it and we was taking pictures of ourselves with our flag and stuff like that. VRG it was Velview Road Gang but I didn't bring that up it was Jeremy that made that up and so that's when I got in trouble and then I trying to see if it was the next day or a

couple days after we got in trouble cause that's how we got caught. I didn't post nothing nobody know my Facebook. Temptation and all that media stuff, media and all that. Social media you know. I mean you can't hide nothing I mean you try and they still find it like the uh the gang relation stuff. Well you know we are in the same grade on the same team hallway and you know how stuff gets around quick on the same hall real quick so you know I'm like back then you think stuff like that is cool but when you look at it now it all about change, people dying and stuff like that. They just kick um out of school. I mean it was better than not going to school you know but at the same time it was like going to school and going to jail but not in handcuffs. I be darned if I get in some handcuffs, I can't do that. I am kindda glad we got in trouble because we would still be doing that right now.

Well I got in high school alternative school it was me Donte what his name Jarone and we was uh waiting on his momma was going to come pick us up. We had just gotten done lifting weights and stuff. We had went to the old gym because it was cold outside and we just wasn't going to sit outside because it was cold outside then he went to the wrestling locker room and came out with a phone. And like he gave me the case and I was like I don't need that case I got two phones and anyway it would never fit my case not my phone. So he did that and I was like you just better not get me in trouble and so it end up the next day I got called to the office and they was like you got something you got to tell me and I was like I don't know what you talking about and they said you Donte and Jarone had stolen a phone and I got it on camera and I was like oh my God. I knew we was going to get into trouble because I kept think about it the whole night. So, I came back and he said it was like there was something all good and then we get to the meeting at the alternative school and I'm like he tried to make me seem like I was bad and I know I wasn't because I know I did not take that phone because I had two phones of my own. Yea! That's what I told Officer Brown he was like I believe you and stuff like that and then Mr. Young came in and oh my God. I'm thinking it's going to turn out to be good like I'm going to be back at the high school. I had went to the meeting that day and Oh my God they was talking about something they brought up old records something like old records what do you mean and he was like you went to the alternative middle school. I was like yea but I learned from that and um I ain't trying to get in anymore trouble since then you can't hold that against me. I had to go to court, court, court, court, court, court, probation, probation, probation for 6 months. On probation I really didn't have to do nothing but community service. I didn't have to do no drug test or nothing like that. I didn't have to call him the only thing I had to do was my community service. I learned how to leave some stuff alone and like you know I just learned from my mistake. I just got to be around the right people.
I was like I did not deserve to be going to the alternative high school for no reason because I know I was there and then we had to split up the payments and all that stuff like that and then probation and I had to stay on probation for 6 months and come to the base school and do community service and then there is some place downtown it was like you do stuff for the homeless people. We would cut grass

and all that stuff and I remember I had just got me some new shoes and I didn't know we was going to go cut no grass and I had to cut grass in the white shoes. That made me mad.

When asked, what did grandma think when you started getting into trouble at school? Tavion replied:

She was I like can't be getting into trouble because I can't and it won't look good for school and stuff cause I always use to tell her that I wanted to be a football player and I am going to buy her a big old mansion or something like that.

When asked what did grandma say when you were placed in alternative school? Tavion replied:

She was mad and said I got to grow up.
Well I know about some of the schools like alternative school you know how they can be completely different alternative school is very small barley any kids in there and the kids that are in there have a bad attitude or got problems see what I am saying. We would get to school late and get out early um I liked it but I did not like the school. Alternative school by the time you get in the 9th grade you better know what you want to do like know what you want to go to college for and doing it right so but the difference between high school and alternative school like ah it is very different. The food is nasty for one, you don't get to go outside, you can't talk, you can't stand up when you want to and then another thing you wear your clothes you can't wear regular clothes you have to wear like a black pants and a white shirt and they got to be tucked in and you got to wear a coat through the summer you have to wear a coat I was like what. It reminded me of a holding cell. It is very small and you can't do anything you really can't do anything. I swear I could walk right up out of here and go to the bathroom like I ask can I go to the bathroom and they be like yes you can but at alternative school no you only get a bathroom break when we tell you can take a bathroom break or something like that.

You get off the bus and you walk through the door. Take off your shoes, take off your belt, take out your pockets like flip them out and uh pull out your shirt and hold your hands up and spread your legs. Uh I be like what you mean I could come in there and I could be tired and I got to do all this stuff and it makes me like oh my God. It would make me mad. Sometimes at the alternative high school, it would be fun like sometimes everybody be laughing or something and sometimes they be like PMSing. Uh I mean ain't nobody gonna bring a weapon or nothing like that to school. I mean everybody bring their phone to school. Teachers bring their phone to school. The only thing you can tell us to do is not bring them out you know if you take um out you can take them and give them back at the end of the day. Uniforms is number 1 then uh how they think they can talk to you I don't like that. They didn't talk to me that way but they like talk to other people like they be like if you don't come on I'm uh taz you. He had always been good with me and some other students he had always been cool with some of us but other people he would listen to them. The other teachers don't listen to what the student got to say. I couldn't take that no more. I mean we can't get up to

go to the bathroom like we could here. Couldn't walk around, couldn't wear what you want to wear. Mean you couldn't do that here but you could wear clothes that you can buy and then those are my stuff.

The classes were easy and I like challenges. I mean it's easy because um they were like they still doing algebra in math class and I get back to the base school and we are doing Geometry, Coordinate Algebra you mean you know I was kindda up stuff. We was kindda doing too much easy stuff. I mean I was Ok when I came back but when I back I knew everything but it was biology I didn't pass it and I'm taking a computer class for it. It was like I only had two classes on the computer and they were boring! The only thing that made her class fun was when she would let us listen to music and let us talk every once in a while but not too loud. When she would let us do stuff but don't get her in trouble at it see what I'm saying. I would keep the hours like it is and ah make sure my teachers got good attitudes toward the students and if they don't they got to go because they got to think they use to be a student once before.

Like at the alternative middle school I liked the teachers except Ms. Todd and Mr. Pole. Ya'll more nicer and the other teachers be like you say something and they be like get out my class but the teacher's at alternative school be like just calm down and stuff like that. Mrs. Clover was always nice and Mrs. Heed and Ms. York know my grandma so. Dr. Hill and uh the principal he was always cool with me. He would be like what up big man and uh and when you get back I want you to be playing football and I'm going to come see you. Yea he came to see me. Yea he was right there when we was walking down you know the bell out there he was right there. He shook my hand and all that and I was like what the world who is this. Dr. Hill and uh darn I can't remember the name. She has long dark hair she an Indian lady at alternative school she was a computer teacher she was supposed to be taking me on a trip to raise money for a scholarship.

When asked, what made you know that they cared about you? Tavion replied:

They would say it I mean they would literally say it and I mean they would show it. I mean like the lady we were just talking about say I would get a bad grade on my computer based assignment thing or something she be like you want me to help you or do you want to try again. She be like I will help you and then you try again and I would be like ok. I did what I had to do I could not get in no trouble I could if I wanted to but I didn't want to sit in no cell. I just wanted to get up out of there. If I had gotten in trouble my time would have been extended.

When asked**,** so what did you think when you first saw the service learning project? Tavion replied:

I didn't know what they was doing at first and she asked if I can help and I said I would but I'm fixing to go because my aunty doesn't live very far so that was it. The video it was little kids that don't have no shoes, no clothes, and they was like dirty. Yea we got shoes well most of us some of us got shoes and some kindda

don't got shoes. Remember the ones well what I mean by that is kindda got shoes and don't have shoes is uh they got shoes on their feet but they kinnda coming off at the same time. Well we got a better world here but people are still struggling and stuff.

Every once a time I be like would be to calm down because we all be like joking around but in one class though. My other classes I be like it seem like they put everybody in the class like that not supposed to be in a class together. See what I'm saying that junk be crazy. That make it fun you want to have fun in that class even though I'm not suppose too.

When asked what was the main reason you got in trouble? Tavion replied:

Being around the wrong people.

Some teachers don't like me and some teachers love me but I really don't care. My grades were good until I got in trouble. Well, sometimes I don't like to sit still because sitting still I don't like a boring class at all. A boring class makes somebody go to sleep or make somebody like I don't know play a lot but I don't do all that playing a lot. I mean I got a 40 and a 55 in 10th grade Literature because it just I was sitting around the wrong people and so she moved me and then my grades started coming up. Literature and ah Intro to Business that ah a computer class but ah that class some of it I did but I just didn't turn it in but they saved it to my u-drive but I just didn't turn them in yet. She just told me I could turn them in and my grade would come up so I ain't worried about that. Yea I was turning them in Mrs. Morris' class I already turned like half of them in but I have a lot of them missing.

After alternative middle school I was like what in the world it seemed like it happened every year it hasn't happened my 10th grade year. Well I was like staying out of trouble ever since I had left the middle school alternative school. I can't remember when it was when we got in trouble but I don't think I was focused on football. All my coaches were like when I went to lift weights and go to class they'd say man you doing good on football and things like that they just kept comforting me. They treated me like I was a regular Tavion.

When asked, did you get suspended this year? Tavion replied:

No, hold on I am lying well I did but it was only for one day but I came back the next day because my little cousin this boy had kicked my little cousin and then I let that slide and then he made a video saying that he was going to kill my little cousin and said he was going to slap her and all kinds of stuff like that and when I seen the video that's when I was like oh no he's got to messed up so I sent one to him and that's how I got in trouble. His momma went over to the alternative school because he had a meeting at the alternative school so the momma showed the video over at the alternative school she don't know what her son is doing that going to end up get him they going to end up killing him or whatever because of the things that he is doing.

When asked, why do you think you have made it this year without getting into any trouble? Tavion replied:

> I got more responsible. I ah do what I have to do I have to look after myself I can't look after other people.

When asked, do you feel like if it had been a white guy that had got caught taking the cell phone do you think the same thing would have happened to him? Tavion replied:

> I don't know, I really don't care because I know if that really went off my record I know I would have been mad. I really don't look at people like that you know I don't really care.
>
> I have more freedom at the base school. Yea I look at it now and I failed some classes. It was Biology that messed me up and now I just have to get back on track because some of my grades are going down. Well, they like coming up but they coming up slow. Now I gotta redo it but people at my job be like would you rather quit school for your job. I literally sit there and curse them out. I was like what I look like quitting school over a job that I can always come back and get. My manager I would always have to call out on Saturday well you see she didn't put me on the schedule because she knew where I had to be at school because I had to come to Saturday school just to keep my grade up. I say hanging around the wrong people going to get you messed up and I plan on staying in my books and do what I got to do. I been playing football now for ah god darn ah seven years I just played last year. Yea you play football they say it is better for like most guys that be in trouble a lot to play football because that's where all the anger come out and stuff like that. It ain't no playing you got to do what you got
> Get up outta here! I've got to get up out of here. Yep, get up outta here. I make promises, I made a promise to my grandmother that I was going to finish school and I was going to make her proud. I made a promise to my girlfriend because she is going somewhere and I want to be right there with her when she goes somewhere. I'm going to get my little apartment for a couple months and then I'm going to go to college and then I'm going to I got to do what I got to do. I got to make it up outta here. Right now I want to go to Georgia Tech cause I want to be an engineer a mechanical engineer or a designer a housing engineer. I'm gonna be fly I'm gonna be turnt. Yea I'm going to college I don't know if I can do that during the summer like Career Center but ah I know I want to go to college for welding and that is for a year I can finish college before I finish high school.
> I think about what I'm going to do in life and what kind of person I'm going to become in life stuff like that. I want to be a rich man and I want to have my own business. Have a luxury life. Yes, I do I have plenty of goals I got like my number 1 goal is to finish up school first. That's the first thing. After I finish College and all that have some kids and take care of my kids, get old, watch my kids grow up and then get old. Then live an old life. My goals are to finish school and save up more money than I have and like be the best I can be in life. I plan to

reach my goals just one step at a time. Nothing can keep me from doing what I want to do or no one can keep me from doing what I want to do so I don't need to worry about that. Uh I'm thinking if I can keep it in my mind I can do it I will always do it. Most important to me is like having a good job if you don't have a good job you want be successful I mean you can be successful but you not going to be successful in a good way. The big influences in my life are my grandma and my dad most of my parents all my family really because they always getting on to me about being good, staying on track, staying focused in school and all that. I'm good at anything but well I don't know but what we is doing in school we got to use that in the real world I know that like math and science you use that for a job. Uh thinking about all the stuff I done did when I was younger like when I get older I can laugh at it like when I'm sitting at a big top desk or something like that. I need encouragement and ah will that about it I don't need anything else.

Tavion is currently at the end of his 10th grade year and is trying to catch up on his grades so he does not fall further behind in his education. He works full time and enjoys making a paycheck and having gainful employment.

Appendix K

Comparing Academic Characteristics of the Document Analysis

Participants	Grade Student was Identified as a Student Placed At-Risk	Academic Area Student Struggled In	Instructional and Behavioral Interventions	Grade Student was Identified as a Student with Disabilities	Special Education Eligibility Category
John	Pre K 1st grade SST Testing TIER 3 of RTI	Communication, Socialization, Reading, Writing	• Learned academics skills through music • Individual One on One Instruction • Small Group Instruction	Pre K and Reevaluated in 2nd grade	Pre K -Speech Kindergarten- Significant Developmental Delay and Speech 2nd grade- Other Health Impairment and Speech
PJ	1st grade referred to SST TIER 3 of RTI	Basic reading skills, reading comprehension, and written expression	• Use of flash cards • Manipulative for math • Reduction of spelling list • Small group work for reading • Sight word practice • Early Intervention Program for reading and math	3rd grade	Specific Learning Disability
Tavion	1st grade referred to SST TIER 3 of RTI	Reading fluency, reading comprehension, written expression, attentional	• Cotaught class room • Flex reading groups • After school tutoring	5th grade	Specific Learning Disability

		difficulties	• One on one tutoring • Early Intervention Program for reading		
Heather	7th grade parent requested evaluation	Short attention span, oppositional, difficulty controlling anger	• Give directions in shorter chunks • Repeat back information • Ask her who, what, where, when, and why questions • Movement breaks • Seat close to instruction • Cooperative learning groups	8th grade	Other Health Impairment
Brianna	3rd grade referred to SST TIER 3 of RTI	Reading, Language Arts, and Math	• Reteach • Collaborative Classroom • Informal read aloud • Teacher assistant for assistance with reading • Informal collaboration • Meet with Specialist in small group • Early Intervention Program for reading and math	4th grade	Specific Learning Disability and Speech

Comparing Behavioral Characteristics of the Document Analysis

Participants	Number of Office Referrals	Reasons for Office Referrals	Numbers of Referrals that Resulted in In School Suspension	Numbers of Referrals that Resulted in Out of School Suspension	Intervention to Assist in Behavior	Reason for Attending Alternative School
John	54 Referrals	Disruption on school bus, disrespect to staff, hitting, fighting, excessive distraction, sexually inappropriate, simple assault, refusal to follow directions, class disruption, excessive talking	17 In School Suspensions	9 Bus Suspensions/16 Out of School Suspension.	Warnings, lunch detention, School Based Intervention Program	Entered Alternative School in 11th grade for Credit Recovery Program
PJ	13 Referrals	Fighting, name calling, disrespect to staff, class	7 In School Suspensions	0 Out of School Suspensions	Parent conference, lunch detention	Entered Alternative School in 11th grade

		disruption				for Credit Recovery Program
Tavion	53 Referrals	Class disruption, bullying, hitting, kicking, fighting, refusal to follow directions, inappropriate classroom behavior, profanity, throwing things, disrespect to staff	22 In School Suspensions	34 Bus Suspensions and 7 Out of School Suspensions	Warning, parent conference, lunch detention, School Based Intervention Program	Gang Related Activity and Theft
Heather	58 Referrals	Class disruption, defiant, talking back, aggressive behavior, walking out of class, disorderly conduct, tardies, skipping, false information, profanity, fighting	28 In School Suspensions	1 Bus Suspension and 10 Out of School Suspensions	Parent notes, warning, lunch detention, School Based Intervention Program	Providing false information and Fighting
Brianna	3 Referrals	Wrote on the back of the school bus seat with a marker, inappropriate physical contact before school	1 In School Suspension	1 Out of School Suspension	Warning	Sex Offence