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In Our Own Voices: Perceptions of Teacher Care Among African American Male Secondary Students with Special Needs

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by

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I am dedicating my dissertation to my son Avery and all of the African American boys in the nation. My prayer is that the work that I do and will do along with others will make a difference in your educational careers. You are brilliant and tenacious. Never let anyone tell you otherwise. Last but not least, to my students, the ones who pushed me to do this work, Dominic, Jerry, Sir and Darrin, you showed me what it means to care unconditionally for students and for that, I am eternally grateful.

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ABSTRACT

In Our Own Voices: Perceptions of Teacher Care Among African American Male Secondary Students with Special Needs

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Historically, African American male students have been disproportionately overrepresented in special education under the eligibility categories emotional disturbance, and behavior disorders. Additionally, African American male students with disabilities have consistently underperformed academically. If a student does not perceive that the teacher cares for him, it may be more difficult for a teacher to be successful in engaging the student in the learning experience. The literature indicates that care is a basic need that is grounded in relationships. In schools, those relationships are based on the interaction between the student and teacher. There is a lack of data that specifically addresses the care of African American male students with special needs in nonpublic-school settings. This qualitative study utilized interviewing as a methodology to better understand how the care of a teacher supported the educational experience of African American males for the purpose of informing teachers and leaders in how to work with this specific population of students by addressing the following research questions: (a) How do African

American male secondary school students with special needs define care? (b) To what extent do African American male secondary school students with special needs' perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experiences? (c) Based on African American male secondary school students' with special needs perceptions of teacher care, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher? (d) How are the three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher, according to the perceptions of African American male secondary school students with special needs?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

As a classroom teacher in the mid-1990s, my principal placed students in my class that other teachers complained about—students who happened to be African American males. Perhaps it was because I had a son, that I felt passionate about developing relationships with those students where they could be free to be themselves. If they had a lot of energy, we would run around the track. If they could not sit still, they were allowed to stand. I wanted the students to be little Black boys who knew they were loved and cared for in school, when traditionally, that had not been the case. When I became a school psychologist, I shared with the principal that I was the wrong person for her if she thought I was going to come in and qualify all little black boys as emotionally disturbed (ED). While practicing as a school psychologist, I often could not qualify students for services—not because they did not need support—but because the educators had failed the students. If we, as educators, believe what Freire (1998) said—that the teacher is an intellectual who, like the student, is engaged preeminently in producing knowledge—then we will approach schooling with care and empathy.

Currently, in my role as a nonpublic school administrator, I work with students who are primarily eligible under the category of emotional disturbance. The student demographic is 77% male and 39% African American. In a conversation with a student, my heart sank when he shared:

> *Student: These teachers don't care about us.*
> *Me: Why do you say that? Tell me more.*

Student: They don't help you if you need extra help, and they are quick to tell you not to come to their class. But that doesn't make sense when they know we are here because we have anger issues.

Over the years, in my various roles of teacher, school psychologist, and administrator; I have heard the same words echoed time and time again by students who do not feel that their teachers care for them. I began to ask myself, what does it mean for a teacher to care? Is there a difference in how care is expressed? Who decides what it means to care? In my educational career, I have been passionate about supporting African American males academically and emotionally, especially those students with special needs.

Problem

As I began to review the literature, I searched for students with disabilities and students with special needs, and the care they received in school. I sought out African American male students with disabilities and their perceptions of care in schools. The results did not yield articles that specifically addressed my area of concern; therefore, I widened my search. As I reviewed literature regarding special education, I was confronted with not only the overwhelming research regarding the overrepresentation and disproportionality of African American male students in special education, under the eligibility categories of mental retardation (now intellectual disability), emotional disturbance, and behavior disorders (Artiles, 2013; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Blanchett, 2006; Deno, 1970, 1994; Dunn, 1968; Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP], 2016; Patton, 1998; Sullivan, Artiles, & Hernandez-Saca, 2015); but also research on the underachievement of African American males with special needs (Brown, 2011; Harry & Anderson, 1999).

Oswald, Coutino, Best, and Singh (1999) conducted a study in which the results indicated that African American students were nearly 2.5 times as likely to be identified as mildly mentally retarded and about 1.5 times as likely to be identified as emotionally disturbed, as compared to their non-African American peers. Lloyd Dunn (1968) first addressed overrepresentation when he found that minority students were overrepresented in the eligibility category of mild mental retardation. Almost 50 years later, overrepresentation of students of color in special education continues (Ferri & Connor, 2014). Overrepresentation may be a result of what Patton (1998) asserted: that mainstream educators interpret the performance of culturally and linguistically diverse learners through the lens of White middle-class parameters of competence. As a result, assumptions are made about the intelligence and behavior of culturally diverse learners (Klingner et al., 2005). Educators may perceive the culturally relevant behaviors of African American male students as a deficit, not as different (Brown, 2011). Teachers' perceptions of academically at-risk students may be due to the fact that they have lower expectations of students, based on race or social class. Teachers' perceptions of African American male students acting out behaviorally may be due to teacher intolerance of behavioral diversity (Gay, 2002). Low expectations of teachers, misperceptions of culturally diverse students, and viewing students through the lens of the dominant culture have led to both the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, and also the underachievement of African American males. I revisit the words of the students: *these teachers do not care about us.*

While I listed multiple suppositions as to why overrepresentation and underachievement persists among African American males, there is another rationale as to why teachers have been unsuccessful in serving African American male students. If students do not perceive that a

teacher cares for them, it may be more difficult for that teacher to be successful in engaging the students in the learning experience (Polite, 1994; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015). An old adage states that students have to know you care before they care how much you know. I have found that the maintenance and enhancement of *caring* (emphasis added) is missing from our educational institutions (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 2005). While scholars have agreed that the care of a teacher is important in the lives of students (Gay, 2000; Noddings, 1992; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009; Schussler & Collins, 2006), the definition of caring varies and depends on who is providing the definition. For example, Noddings, Gay, Schussler and Collins, and Shaunessy and McHatton all described caring as relational. Noddings stated that the hallmarks of caring are to listen attentively and to respond as positively as possible. Gay stated that teachers who are caring demonstrate concern for children's emotional, physical, economic, and social well-being. Schussler and Collins defined caring as involving a relationship between a person, marked by a desire to understand the other and help the other reach his potential. Finally, Shaunessy and McHatton stated that a caring teacher is an individual who promotes respectful relationships with students.

When students were asked to describe a caring teacher, they gave both relational and academic descriptions of caring. Definitions of caring provided by students included: a teacher who teaches to understand, has high expectations for behavior and academics, knows the subject matter, discusses personal problems the students are having, speaks with students privately and individually, and provides constructive feedback (Alder, 2002; Schussler & Collins, 2006; Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009).

In addition to providing both relational and academic views of caring, student descriptions of how caring is expressed also varied by level, based on the work of Ferreira and Bosworth (2001). Middle school students expressed that caring teachers establish relationships with students and have academic knowledge. Adolescents preferred teachers who expressed interest in their lives, provided choice in the learning process, asked for input from students, and gave students autonomy in the classroom. Teenage students described caring teachers as trusting adults who check student progress, provide support and guidance both inside and outside of class, and are honest, fair, and direct. In this study, the relational and academic views of caring guided the exploration of teacher care. The definition of caring that was employed has been coined by Noddings (2005), which is a connection or encounter between two human beings.

In their 2009 mixed-methods study, Shaunessy and McHatton recounted the perceptions of 577 students in grades 9-12, regarding their teachers. Participants were in various programs, including general education, honors, and special education. The students believed they would learn more if teachers made greater investments in personal relationships with them. This study provided an opportunity for students to share their perspectives of the interactions with their teachers in their own voices. Student voice is not always captured in the research as it relates to students' educational experiences.

While there has been research that addresses the critical component of teacher care, the research does not solely address African American males. The body of research addresses the need for caring teachers (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Gardner & Mayes, 2013; Howard, 2001; Noddings, 2002; Rogers, 1975; Shevelier & McKenzie, 2012), and speaks to how a caring teacher improves the learning of students with special needs (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008; Gay,

2002; Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & Alvarez-McHatton, 2009; Stough & Palmer, 2003); but there is a gap in the research with respect to perceptions of African American male secondary students with special needs in non-public schools, regarding the care they receive from their teachers.

Research Questions

Noddings (2001) has found that care is a basic need that is grounded in relationships. In schools, these relationships are based on the interaction between the student and teacher. Research supports the principle that care is a necessary component for student learning to occur (Vega et al., 2015). African American students perform best when the teacher demonstrates personal care and concern, while holding the students to high expectations with regard to academic achievement (Gay, 2002). While the research speaks to the care and achievement of African American students in general, no research specifically addresses the care of African American males; however, there has been research addressing the underachievement of African American males (Brown, 2011; Fultz & Brown, 2008; Harry & Anderson, 1999). McIntyre and Battle (1998) determined within their study that African American students with special needs rated caring high with respect to teacher effectiveness, but there are no data regarding African American males as they relate to care. There has, however, been consistent research regarding the disproportionality of African American males in special education (Artiles, 2013; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Blanchett, 2006; Deno, 1970, 1994; Dunn, 1968; Sullivan et al., 2015).

There is a lack of data that specifically addresses the care of African American male students with special needs in non-public school settings. As a result of the gap in the literature, I chose to address the following research questions:

1. How do African American male secondary students with special needs define care?

2. To what extent do African American male secondary school students' with special needs perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experiences?
3. Based on African American male secondary school students' with special needs perceptions of teacher care, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher?
4. How are the three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher, according to the perceptions of African American male secondary school students with special needs?

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study was to listen to the voices of African American male students with disabilities in specialized secondary educational settings, to better understand how the care of a teacher supports them in their educational experience, and to make recommendations on how to best meet the needs of this specific group of students. Duncan and Jackson (2004) posited that educational research should privilege the voices of those who are on the receiving end of the inequalities in schools. With regard to this exploration, African American male students' voices are central to the discussion of care provided in the classroom.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for two reasons. The first reason is that it aims to impact both teacher and administrator practice, as it relates to care in working with African American male students with special needs on the secondary level in non-public school settings. The second reason this study is significant is that it privileges the voices of students being served in non-public secondary schools, which makes it an authentic and unique resource that should be added

to the body of literature regarding the educational experiences of African American male students. There has been research conducted on African American males, but because the special education data is not disaggregated by ethnicity and gender, there is an absence of literature that specifically addresses African American male students being served on the secondary level in non–public school settings. By focusing on this specific group of students, this study aspires to explore African American male secondary school students' perceptions of the care they receive from their teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the review of literature, I conducted the study utilizing a blend of theories to construct the theoretical framework. DisCrit - disability critical race theory (Connor, Ferri & Annamma, 2016), ethic of care theory (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 2005), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) was used to address the research questions.

DisCrit

Students of color with disabilities are not always given the opportunity to show what they know, especially when they are in schools that are predominately White. Studies have found that schools with predominately White students and teachers placed disproportionately high numbers of their minority students into special education (Beratan, 2008). Disability critical race studies (DisCrit) theory in education is a framework that addresses the ways that race, racism, disability, and ableism impact the interactions, procedures, conversations, and institutions of education (Connor et al., 2016). Connor et al. (2016) have proposed seven tenets regarding DisCrit theory:

1. Racism and ableism are interdependent, but are neutralized and invisible to maintain normalcy. Multidimensional identities are valued, rather than singular notions of identity.

2. Social constructions of race and ability are emphasized while recognizing the psychological impact of being labeled, which sets one outside of Western cultural norms.
3. DisCrit theory privileges the voices of marginalized populations that are not acknowledged in research.
4. DisCrit theory considers both the legal and historical aspects of race and disability, and how each has been used individually to deny the rights of citizens of color.
5. DisCrit theory recognizes that the gains made by people labeled with disabilities are largely the result of Whiteness and ability as property of White middle-class citizens.
6. DisCrit theory requires activism, and supports all forms of resistance.

DisCrit theory is necessary to understanding the positionality of African American students with special needs who have historically endured educational and social inequality.

Ethic of Care

Noddings (2005) defined caring as a connection or encounter between two human beings: the carer and the cared-for. The ethic of care is a relational way of governing ourselves. When operating from the ethic of care, there is a commitment to perform a specific act, or to think about what one might do on behalf of the cared-for. The commitment stems from the carer's state of consciousness, which is characterized as engrossment and motivational displacement. Engrossment is defined as an "open, nonselective receptivity to the cared-for" (Noddings, 2005, p. 15). Engrossment is the emptying of one's soul in preparation of receiving another (Noddings, 2005). Motivational displacement is the desire to help what arises from the carer being engrossed. There are times when caring is natural, such as what occurs between a parent and his or her child; but the ethic of care, as it relates to education, involves caring for students whom

the teacher has yet to meet, or for those to whom a natural desire to care does not exist. Noddings (1984) expressed four major components of moral education from the perspective of the ethic of care: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

Modeling requires that we show our students how to care by creating caring relations with them. Dialogue is open ended. It gives the carer and the cared-for an opportunity to engage in dialogue and make a determination together. Practice requires opportunities for students to gain experience in caregiving. Students are traditionally known as the cared-for, whereas teachers are the carers; but students learn to be the carers during practice. The final component is confirmation. When we confirm, we spot a better self and encourage its development. Confirmation is not ignoring harmful behavior. It is painting a different picture for the student and encouraging a more positive choice.

Each component of the ethic of care is necessary in supporting African American male students with special needs. In the classroom climate, care as an ethic of teaching refers to explicitly showing affective and nurturing behavior toward students, which can have a positive influence on their desire to learn (Howard, 2001). Schussler and Collins (2006) posited that if care is the central belief in a school, then structures that facilitate care would exist, students would more than likely perceive that they are cared for, and academic achievement among students would be positively impacted. Students are more willing to persist if they believe their teachers care. An example of care was noted in a quantitative study where Howard (2001) found that African American students preferred teachers who displayed caring bonds and attitudes toward them.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The cultural frame of the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy is based on four components: the ethic of care, concrete experiences as a criterion for meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, and the ethic of personal accountability. Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that culturally relevant pedagogy is "a theoretical model that not only addresses student achievement, but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (p. 469). The overrepresentation of African American male students in special education is an example of the inequity that is perpetuated in schools. In the development of the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings identified three suppositions: the conception of self and others, social relations, and the conception of knowledge by culturally relevant teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The conception of self and others references the principle that culturally relevant educators believe all students are capable of academic success, they [teachers] are a part of the community in which they teach, teaching is a way to give back to the community, and the teaching profession is unpredictable and always changing (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Regarding the concept of social relations, Ladson-Billings stated that teachers addressed the maintenance of student-teacher relationships, demonstrated connectedness with all of the students, developed a community of learners, and encouraged students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another (Ladson-Billings, 1995). A demonstration of social relations principles included the teachers encouraging collaborative learning, rather than relying on individualistic achievement. The conception of knowledge refers to the ways in which teachers engage students in the

curriculum, and how they assess student growth. Teachers believe that knowledge is not static, but that it is shared, recycled, constructed, and must be viewed critically (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Each of the theories described above plays an integral role in supporting African American male students with special needs.

Intersection of the Theories

A blending of the three theories described above was necessary to explore the questions: (a) How do African American male secondary school students with special needs define care? (b) To what extent do African American male secondary school students' with special needs perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experiences? (c) Based on African American male secondary school students' with special needs perceptions of teacher care, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher? (d) How are the three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher, according to the perceptions of African American male secondary school students with special needs?

Figure 1 illustrates the intersectionality of the theories. Tenet 4 of DisCrit is at the center, because the study focused on hearing the voices of students. In an effort to better understand the perceptions of African American male students in special education, it is important to privilege the voices of marginalized populations that are not acknowledged in research. African American male students in special education have been the subjects of studies, but the research has been scant with regard to hearing and listening to the students (Connor et al., 2016). Studies on student perceptions of care have described both relational and academic views of care. It is

vitally important to ground the study with the voices of students who are impacted the most by teacher care.

The second component of the theoretical framework is to explore from the perspective of students, whether or not teachers implement the four components of the ethic of care—modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation—in order for students to feel cared for in their classrooms (Noddings, 1984). Do teachers non-selectively receive students and demonstrate their desire to help, even when students don't reciprocate the caring? The students are the only ones who can provide this information, based on their educational experiences.

The final component of the theoretical framework is the degree to which teachers employ the three suppositions of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: (a) the conception of self and others, (b) social relations, and (c) the conception of knowledge. Culturally relevant teachers in classrooms support the needs of African American learners (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ethic of care theory was foundational in guiding the development of culturally relevant pedagogy as a theory. As a result, a commitment and desire to help students should be evident in student-teacher interactions. Further, the students' accounts of interactions with their teachers revealed the extent to which culturally relevant pedagogy as a practice has been demonstrated in the educational experiences of the students.

The overrepresentation of African American male students in special education exemplifies the inequity perpetuated in our educational institutions. Research has found that care is an integral part of culturally responsive pedagogical methods. Teacher care, its connection to culture, and its powerful influence in the lives of African American students cannot be overlooked. The historical, social, and educational injustices of African American male students

with special needs must be addressed through a critical lens. A blending of DisCrit theory, ethic of care theory, and culturally relevant pedagogy supports the care necessary for African American male students with special needs.

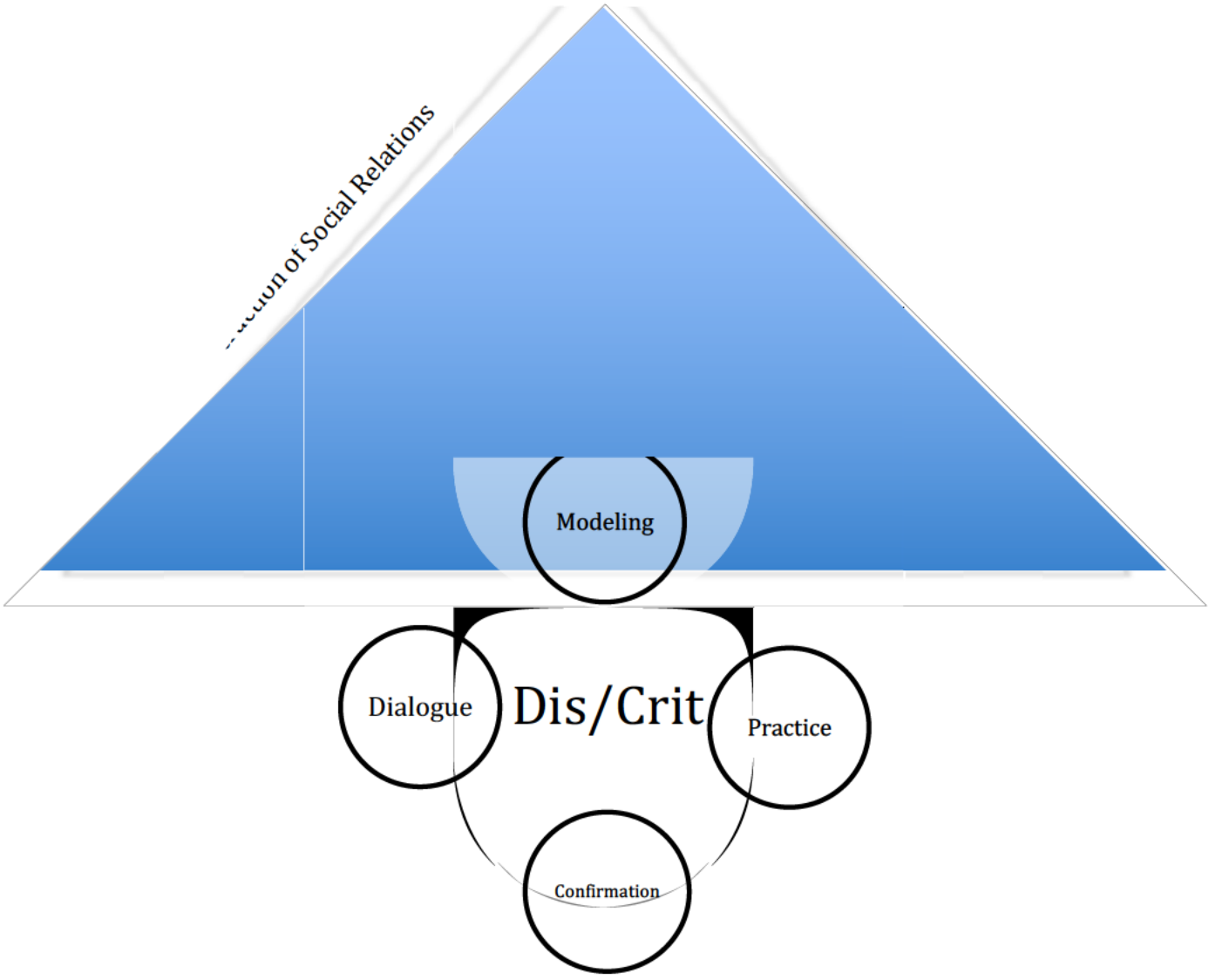


Figure 1. Theoretical framework.

Research Design and Methodology

In order to address the four research questions, (a) How do African American male secondary students with special needs define care? (b) To what extent do African American male secondary school students' with special needs perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experiences? (c) Based on African American male secondary school students' with special needs perceptions of teacher care, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher? (d) How are the three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher, according to the perceptions of African American male secondary school students with special needs?

I employed a qualitative study working in a 9th–12th grade non-public secondary school. Along the continuum of placements under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), students in a non–public school setting are educated in a separate school from their non-disabled peers. The participants in the study included five African American male students with special needs, who were from a non-public school within the greater Los Angeles area. The age range of the students varied between 13 and 16. Students who were 18-years-old or older were able to consent to participate in the study. Students under the age of 18 could assent to participate in the study after the parent/guardian provided consent. Each student participated in three semistructured interviews. Each interview lasted for less than 1 hour. The focus of the study was based on the fourth tenet of DisCrit theory, which seeks to privilege the voices of the marginalized that are excluded from the literature (Connor et al., 2016). Interviewing as a methodology is based on the dialogue component of the ethic of care. Noddings stated, “The purpose of dialogue is to come into contact with ideas and to understand, to meet the other and to

care" (Noddings, 1984, p. 186). The interview format allowed for dialogue with students to hear their voices.

Limitations of the Study

Based on the population of students invited to participate in this study, one of the limitations was access to African American male students with special needs in secondary non–public school settings. Although the percentage of African American male students in non-public schools in the greater Los Angeles area is large (nearly 40% or higher in programs for students eligible with an emotional disturbance), there were students who were not willing or unable to participate in the study. For example, a potential participant's parent provided consent for his participation in the study, but when I met with the student, he would not assent to participate. Another limitation was that a parent/guardian (of a student under age 18) was not willing to allow his or her child to participate due to the sensitivity of the topic to be explored. A third limitation was the inability to gain access or consent from a guardian because the student was in out-of-home placement, or parental rights had been limited. A fourth limitation was that students were discharged from enrollment during the recruiting phase of the study. As a result of the limitations, the pool of potential participants was reduced from 24 to 16. After the recruiting phase, the final number of participants was five.

Delimitations of the Study

I limited this study to African American male students with special needs, rather than students of color with special needs; this will impact the generalizability of the study. I also chose to explore a more restrictive setting by focusing on non-public schools, rather than a traditional comprehensive middle or high school. Furthermore, the study provided information

on a small, defined group of students due to the small sample size. Limiting the study to students who were on the secondary level further affected generalizability to a wider range of students with special needs. Elementary school students were not included in this study, as those students have a higher likelihood of returning to a traditional school setting than secondary school students. Although there was a specific subgroup of students addressed in the study, school leaders may still find the results beneficial to their practice.

Assumptions

I made three assumptions in this study. The first assumption I made was that the African American male study participants would be honest and tell the truth. The second assumption was that African American male students knew and understood what it meant for a teacher to care for them. The third assumption was that students in restrictive settings, such as non-public schools, had experienced teacher care in their current school setting or in a previous school setting.

Definition of Key Terms

Cared-for – the person on the receiving end of caring. In the student-teacher relationship, the student is the cared-for (Noddings, 1984).

Disproportionality – when students' representation in special education programs (or specific special education categories) exceeds their proportional enrollment in a school's general population (Blanchett, 2006).

Emotional Disturbance (ED)/Emotional Behavior Disorder (BD) – a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time, and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

- An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- A generally pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Emotional disturbance (including schizophrenia) – this term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Ethic of Care – a relational way of interacting with others. It requires a commitment to act a certain way on behalf of the cared-for, or a commitment to thinking about what one might do on behalf of the cared-for (Noddings, 1984).

Mild Mental Retardation (MR)/Intellectual Disability (ID) – significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, which adversely affects a child's educational performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Motivational displacement – the desire to help someone (Noddings, 1984).

Non-public schools – private schools certified by the state to contract with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to provide services to students who have not been successfully served in traditional school programs.

One caring – the person who is caring for someone else. In the student-teacher relationship, the teacher is the one caring (Noddings, 1984).

Overrepresentation – students being placed in special education at rates higher than that of White students.

Student with special needs or disabled – a child evaluated as having mental retardation, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to as "emotional disturbance"), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Organization of Dissertation

African American male students have been overrepresented in special education programs particularly under the eligibilities of emotional disturbance and behavioral disorders, intellectual disability, and specific learning disability for decades, and before Dunn's (1968) seminal work in the area was published. The overrepresentation and disproportionality affects the academic achievement of African American males (Brown, 2011; Noguera, 2003). Research has shown that students perform better when they feel a connection to the teacher and when they believe the teacher cares (Howard, 2001; Noddings, 2005). The voices of African American male students with special needs are often not represented in the literature (Connor et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was to provide opportunities for African American male secondary school students' voices to be represented, by sharing their perceptions of the care shown to them by their teachers.

The four remaining chapters survey the literature, describe the methodology that was employed, and discuss the findings and the recommendations and implications of those findings. More specifically, Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature around two themes. The first theme addresses care with regard to the educational experiences of African American males. The second theme addresses the care of students with special needs, including a discussion of the disproportionality and overrepresentation of African American males in special education. The theoretical framework is also discussed, including an explanation of why a blending of disability critical race studies (DisCrit), the ethic of care, and culturally relevant pedagogy was necessary to address the topic.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology of this study, including the context, participants, measures, and plan; and details the interview protocol and observation protocol that was utilized. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 concludes the study with a discussion of the findings, and posits implications for these findings as well as makes recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The ethic of care describes a relational view of interacting with others. The natural inclination to care is different from a moral imperative to care. African Americans have historically been treated as inferior by the dominant culture, and less than human by the law. If the ethic of care theory had been named during the enslavement of Africans and later African Americans, those ethics would not have been extended to African Americans, because there was no moral imperative to care for African Americans. Systemic oppression refers to the historical marginalization of people solely based on their identification as members of an ethnic group, which leads to the passage and enforcement of laws that support systemic mistreatment. From the mid-15th century to the present, the marginalization of African Americans has negatively impacted their lives, including being denied educational experiences. From the slave codes, which made it illegal to teach slaves to read (Palmer, Wood, Dancy, & Strayhorn, 2014), to discriminatory economic practices that resulted in a disparity in school finances (which negatively affects African American students), African Americans continue to be marginalized. The legacy of oppressive practices has resulted in systems and structures that further marginalize African American males. Nieto (2008) stated:

> Caring within a structure plagued by inequality takes multiple forms, and at some moments when we think we are caring for students of color, we actually are harming them because we are failing to counter a social structure that treats them unequally. (p. 1)

The historical underachievement of African American males, as well as the disproportionate overrepresentation of African American males in special education programs, is a manifestation of Nieto's statement.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to listen to the voices of African American male students with disabilities in secondary non–public school settings, to better understand how the care of a teacher supports them in their educational experience. The literature review addresses two main areas from the standpoint of students and their perceptions of the care they receive from teachers. Following a historical view of care, the first theme was care with regard to the educational experiences of African American males. The second theme was the care of students with special needs, including discussion of the disproportionality and overrepresentation of African American males in special education. The literature review will conclude by providing background on the theories that will blend to form the theoretical framework of the study.

Historical Care or Lack of Care for African American Students in Schools

Following the abolition of slavery in 1865, there was still a concern that educating freed men would lead to racial upheaval (Spivey, 1978). Congress established The Freedman Bureau in 1865 for the purpose of assisting formerly enslaved Blacks with food, medicine, jobs, and education. Thousands of schools were established for Blacks. Years later, *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) gave states the constitutional authority to maintain separate but equal accommodations for Blacks (Jackson, 2007). Black principals led Black schools with a culture of excellence, and Black teachers taught Black students in affirming educational environments (Tillman, 2007). However, Black students were not afforded the same opportunities and access as their White counterparts, because funding and facilities for Black schools were inherently unequal (Brown &

Dancy, 2008). In the landmark case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to restrict school settings by race, determining that the education that Black students received was unequal. An unintended consequence of Brown was that Black principals were replaced with White principals, and the rhetoric soon became that Black principals were ineffective because Black students were unprepared (Tillman, 2007). As Black students began to integrate into schools where the leaders and teachers were White, the idea of racial inferiority permeated the school systems, and the cultural perspectives that were crucial in the education of Black students were lost (Tillman, 2007). The failure of people and institutions to care for Black students led to renewed discrimination.

Discrimination as a Lack of Care for African American Students by Teachers

African American students have had to endure discrimination by teachers in the classroom setting, perhaps, because some educators perceive the culturally relevant behaviors of students of color—and African American students in particular—as a deficit and not as different. For example, if an African American male challenges something the teacher says in class or doesn't agree with something that was read, the teacher may categorize the exchange as the student being disrespectful; but when a White male student exhibits the same or similar behavior, the student is said to be demonstrating critical thinking skills (Howard, 2008).

Rosenbloom and Way (2004) conducted a qualitative study of 20 Asian, 20 African American, and 20 Latino ninth-grade students in an effort to understand adolescents' views of discrimination in their urban high school. Semistructured interviews were conducted over a 2-year period. The results of the study indicated that African American students perceived their teachers as implicitly or explicitly racist or discriminatory. Beyond the perception that teachers

were discriminatory, African American students viewed the teachers as uncaring and ineffective. Student responses in the interviews indicated that the teachers held low academic expectations and acted on stereotypes about "bad kids" or kids who "start trouble." The students felt that no matter what their actual behavior was in the classroom, teachers typically stereotyped them as bad kids (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). Students perceived the racist or discriminatory actions of the teachers as uncaring behavior. When students identified characteristics of a caring teacher, the description was consistent with academic caring. They included examples such as a caring teacher who helps students when they do not understand the material, maintains high expectations, and encourages the students to study and achieve academic excellence.

Students' Perceptions of Care in the Classroom

In the review of the literature regarding care of the classroom teacher and/or student teacher interactions, no empirical studies directly addressed all concepts of the proposed study. This section will briefly address the care of students in general, and African American males specifically, with regard to the students' perceptions of the care they receive from their teachers. The section will conclude with a review of literature regarding teacher perceptions.

Siddle-Walker (1996) described interpersonal caring as, "evidence that individual or individuals provide direct attention to meeting the psychological, sociological, and/or academic needs of another individual or individuals within the school environment" (p. 216). Based on this description, relational caring and academic caring are encompassed in the description of interpersonal caring. This theme relates to students' perceptions that interpersonal caring is lacking from their schooling experiences, or that it is necessary for a successful schooling experience.

Several studies have been conducted regarding students' perceptions of their schooling experiences across grade levels, including elementary through secondary students. In a research study of the schooling experiences of African American students conducted by Hollins and Spencer (1990), the following ideas emerged: positive relationships between teachers and students affected academic achievement, teachers' responsiveness to students' personal lives led to positive feelings and increased effort in school, and students preferred teachers who allowed them to actualize their ideas in completing assignments and becoming engaged in classroom discussions. The examples provided by the students included both academic and relational caring.

Wentzel (1997) conducted a study on the perceptions of middle-school students in eighth grade, with regard to pedagogical caring. In this longitudinal study, 248 students were followed for three years. There were 125 boys in the study; however, only 2% of the study participants were African American and the data were not disaggregated by gender and ethnicity. The students completed a survey in which they rated the caring they received from their classroom teachers. Examples of caring included: the teacher made a special effort, made the class interesting, talked to the students, paid attention, listened, asked questions, took the time to make sure students understood, told the students when they performed well in class, and praised the students. The students' perceptions of caring were consistent with both academic and relational caring. Overall, caring from teachers was positively related to students' academic effort.

Schussler and Collins (2006) conducted an empirical study of 16 students from Middle College in grades 10–12 who were at risk of dropping out of school. The percentage of African American male students enrolled in the school was only 3.2%, and, as a result, ethnicity was not

addressed in the data analysis. Half of the participants were male. The purpose of the study was to explore caring relationships in the school. Students participated in three rounds of in-depth interviews. One of the five caring relationships that emerged from the data analysis was teacher-to-student relationships, which comprised three types of interactions: academic, personal, and social. The main conclusions from the data were: (a) students wanted to be cared for and wanted to demonstrate care, (b) care was associated with positive outcomes, and (c) a family atmosphere within the school was necessary to establish care as a core value in the school. The perceptions of teacher care by students, as stated in the referenced studies, have addressed both relational and academic descriptions of caring.

Care and African American Students

This study focused on African American male secondary students' with special needs perceptions of care received from teachers. The research is scant with regard to the specific components of this study. As a result, the following studies review African American students' perceptions of care. Howard (2008) conducted a study in which 200 African American males completed a survey regarding their schooling experiences and the role that race played in them. A subset of the students was interviewed, and 10 students became the participants of the study. One of the themes that emerged from the counter stories of participants was an awareness of negative stereotypes (Howard, 2008). One participant shared a comment made by his teacher when it was determined that although he was an athlete, he was also a member of the Associated Student Body (ASB) and was interested in earning an academic scholarship to attend college due to his good grades. The teacher stated, “You’re not like the rest of them” (Howard, 2008, p. 970). Another student shared that the teachers in his predominately White school did not let the Black

males forget that they were Black. African American male students within the study shared that if they made poor choices, they were suspended or expelled, whereas, their White counterparts received warnings or afterschool detention referrals (Howard, 2008). The teachers' perceptions of Black males influenced the way in which they interacted with the students.

Slaughter-Defoe and Carlson (1996) determined, in their study comprised of 1,000 African American and 260 Latino third-grade students, that interactive teacher-child relationships were the most important dimension of school climate for African American students, based on questionnaire data. Lee (1999) conducted an ethnographic study in which 40 students across grade levels and various ethnic backgrounds participated in interviews to better understand three ideas: (a) gaining an understanding of academic difficulties that the students experienced, (b) understanding how curricular and instructional variables influenced student achievement, and (c) identifying areas of school reform that needed to improve. Student researchers were called upon to interview students in an effort to address reform from an ethnographic standpoint. The following themes emerged with regard to the underachievement of African American and Latino students: (a) teacher-centered classrooms did not include projects and activities, but focused on lecture; (b) perceived racism and discrimination; and (c) lack of personal teacher-student relationships, which was perceived as a lack of caring. Actions that contributed to the students' perceptions of a lack of caring on the part of the teacher included teachers having low academic expectations of students, teachers not speaking to them outside of the classroom, and teachers not knowing them on an individual level. The actions depicted both relational and academic views of caring.

In a study examining African American elementary school students' perceptions of their learning environments by Howard (2001), the themes that emerged were the importance of caring teachers, the establishment of a community/family-type classroom environment, and education as entertainment. Examples of caring teachers were teachers who provided positive reinforcement, held students to high expectations, praised students for their accomplishments, and took time to find out about students outside of the school setting. The examples demonstrated both relational and academic views of caring.

Teacher Perceptions of African American Males

In a seminal work on teacher expectations in the classroom, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) conducted a study in which teachers in an elementary school setting were given information about the students in their class based on an IQ test to determine whether or not the students' performance would be impacted by the teachers' perceptions. The study concluded that when the teacher knew that the student was expected to bloom academically based on his or her IQ score, the student bloomed because the teacher's attitude or mood was different based on the information that was provided about the student. Teachers' perceptions of students can have either a positive or a negative impact on the academic achievement of students.

Historically, African American males have not been afforded the "equal" opportunity that all students are supposed to receive as a right of American citizens (Nicolas et al., 2008). African American male students are oftentimes not afforded equal opportunities in the classroom due to the beliefs, assumptions, or perceptual biases of teachers in the form of low expectations, which produce unsuccessful academic performance and behavior (Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, & Shuan, 1990).

The perceptions of teachers, both Black and non-Black, can impact the academic achievement of African American males. In a study conducted by Garibaldi (1992), 2,250 African American males completed a survey; 40% of the respondents believed that their teachers did not set high goals for them, and 60% of respondents felt that their teachers should have pushed them harder. As part of the same study, 318 teachers responded to the survey question as to whether or not they believed the African American male students would attend college. The results were nearly 6 out of 10 teachers did not believe that the students would attend college. Of the teachers who responded, 60% of the teachers taught elementary school students, 70% of the teachers had 10 or more years of teaching experience, and 65% of the teachers were Black (Garibaldi, 1992). If teachers, Black and non-Black, do not understand the attitudes that influence the way in which Black males perceive school and academics, they will continue to be unsuccessful in positively impacting the academic achievement of Black male students (Noguera, 2003).

Patton (1998) asserted that mainstream educators interpret the performance of culturally and linguistically diverse learners through the lens of White middle-class parameters of competence. Teachers will judge African American children to be culturally deprived when they do not behave or have not learned White middle-class ways (Hollins & Spencer, 1990). As a result, assumptions are made about the intelligence of culturally diverse learners, as well their behavior (Klingner et al., 2005). Assumptions are based on perceptions. More specifically, "Teachers' perceptions of culture-related identities and their manifestations in the classroom are especially relevant to school achievement by students" (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003).

Teachers' perceptions play a significant role in student performance in the classroom. In a qualitative study conducted by Neal et al. (2003), 136 middle school teachers viewed one of four videotapes and completed a questionnaire. The majority of the teachers in the group were European American females. The authors have found that teachers perceived African American and European American students who walked with a stroll to be lower in achievement than African American and European American students with a standard movement style. The protocol required teachers to view a videotape of two students walking, and complete a questionnaire with adjectives that indicated perceptions of aggression, achievement, and the need for special education services. Some of the behaviors exhibited by African American learners may be misinterpreted by teachers as cognitive or behavioral disabilities, thereby placing them at an increased risk for being labeled as needing special education services (Neal et al., 2003).

Special Education Disproportionality and Overrepresentation of African American Males

This section of the literature review addresses the overrepresentation of African American males in special education. I begin with some background on Special Education law, which has impacted the educational attainment of African American students as well as the social construction of disabilities, which in turn has contributed to the disproportionality of African American males in special education. Next, I address the role of teacher care in supporting students with special needs. There is limited data that specifically address African American students' with special needs perceptions of the care received from their teachers, or African American males in special education, specifically.

Special Education Law

Connor et al. (2016) stated, “Special education has had the effect of remaking centuries old categories that treat people of color as less able, less deserving, and ultimately, less human” (p. 54). Prior to the implementation of special education legislation, students with unique needs were denied participation in federally funded programs, and discriminatory practices were common—including assessment and placement of underserved students in programs for the mentally retarded (Zettel & Ballard, 1979). There were several court cases leading up to The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Public Law 94-142, which was signed into law on November 29, 1975. This was an important piece of legislation not just regarding children with special needs who were denied admission into federally funded schools, but also in making provisions for nondiscriminatory practices, including assessment and placement that would lead to overrepresentation of minority students in classes for the mentally retarded.

Two important cases related to special education services and students of color were *Diana v The State Board of Education* (1970) in Northern California, and *Larry P. v Riles* (1972) in San Francisco. In both cases, the plaintiffs were placed in classes for the mentally retarded, solely based on performance on an intelligence test. In the case of *Diana v State Board of Education* (1970), the students were administered an intelligence test in English, and because they were not tested in their primary language, the students were identified as mentally retarded. The case was resolved by consent agreement in which every child eligible under the category of mental retardation who was either Mexican American or Asian (“Oriental” at the time of the article) was to be reevaluated in his or her primary language, and the district was required to begin the process of creating a standardized intelligence test. In the case of *Larry P. v Riles* (1972), the court prohibited the San Francisco Unified School District from placing Black

students in classes for the educable mentally retarded based on one intelligence test as the primary determinant of intellectual ability, due to the racial imbalance of the classes with Black children.

While the overall percentage of students receiving special education services under the category of emotional disturbance (ED) was 5% across the United States, 8% of African American students were receiving services in the ED category (USDOE, 2016). In addition to the disproportionate rates with which African American students were placed in special education programs, based on data from the fall of 2014, 17% of African American students were placed in general education classes for less than 40% of the day, as compared to 10% of White students (USDOE, 2016); this means that African American students were in more restrictive settings. African American students account for 5.9% of students placed in other environments categorized as separate schools, including non-public schools, residential facilities, homebound/hospital environments, correctional facilities, and parentally placed private schools (USDOE, 2016).

For the purposes of the current study, when referring to separate settings or more restrictive settings, I am referring to *non-public school settings*. Non-public schools are private schools certified by the state to contract with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to provide services to students who have not been successfully served in traditional school programs. In the State of California, African American students make up 5.8% of the school-age population. African American students account for 8.64% of students with special needs; however, 15.1% of African American students with special needs are eligible under the category of emotional disturbance. Although African American students encompass a small percentage of the school-

age population, they make up 19% of the student enrollment in non-public schools, according to the California Department of Education (CDE, 2016). There is disproportionate representation of African American students in special education programs. As discussed previously, teacher perceptions play a role in student referral for special education services and placement.

Disproportionality and Overrepresentation in Special Education

Disproportionality occurs when a group of students in any program are represented in the program at significantly higher rates than their percentage in the school population as a whole (Harry & Anderson, 1999). The disproportionate representation of African American students in special education has been a topic of study by the Office of Civil Rights for more than three decades. In this section, I will address the historical disproportionality of African Americans in Special Education, followed by the debate surrounding disproportionality, including the social construction of disabilities. Lastly, I will address care from the perspective of students with special needs. Again, the data do not specifically address the perceptions of teacher care by African American male students with special needs.

Disproportionality of African Americans in Special Education

The disproportionality and overrepresentation of African American students in special education began even before special education legislation was enacted in 1975. Lloyd Dunn (1968) first addressed the overrepresentation of minority students—primarily African American, Latino, and Native American students—in classes for the mildly mentally retarded in 1968 (Artiles & Trent, 1994). In the article, Dunn foreshadowed the increase of overrepresentation due to an increase in racial integration and militant teacher organizations that demanded more special

class placements for students who were slow learners and/or disruptive (Dunn, 1968). Dunn (1968) stated:

> 60-80 percent of the students in the classes for the mildly retarded were students from low status backgrounds; Afro-Americans, American Indians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans; children from nonstandard English speaking, broken, disorganized, and inadequate homes; and children from other non-middle class environments. (p. 6)

Blanchett (2006) stated that special education for African American students has not operated according to its intent, which is to provide appropriate strategies or modifications in an effort to reintegrate students into the general education program. Special education became a place and a location for African American students to be segregated from the mainstream (Blanchett, 2006). Dunn challenged the idea that homogeneous grouping of students that were labeled mildly retarded and being placed in separate classes and schools was a form of tracking. In September 1967, the Wright decision abolished tracking, contending that it was discriminatory against the racially and/or economically disadvantaged, and therefore was in violation of the Fifth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States (Dunn, 1968). In a provocative move, Dunn stated in the article that if he were Negro and he knew of the Wright decision, he would have gone to court before allowing schools to assign a label of mentally retarded and place his child in a special class or school. Several lawsuits followed, including *Arreola v Santa Ana Board of Education* (1968) and *Diana v Board of Education* (1970), in which the placement of students in special education as educable mentally retarded occurred with Mexican children.

With regard to African American children, the *Larry P. v Riles* (1972) case attempted to address the overrepresentation issue from a legislative standpoint, but that only affected the state

of California. What Dunn claimed in his seminal article has now manifested to other eligibility categories, including learning disabilities and emotional disturbance. Dunn's article primarily focused on changing special education to make it more acceptable for the students who were receiving services (Dunn, 1968); however, Evelyn Deno was concerned with the system and process of special education eligibility.

Evelyn Deno's (1970) landmark article stated that the model used to determine eligibility as well as provide services was flawed. Deno was concerned that the provision of special education services was based on federal special education funding, which was linked to categorical definitions of eligibility. Essentially, if a student met the eligibility criteria for mental retardation, there was funding for services; but if a student was a slow learner, then there was no additional funding. The funding was then used to segregate students from the general education students. Deno believed that the overrepresentation of students in the categories of mentally retarded should not relegate children to special classes or special schools, if regular classroom teachers received help from support personnel on how to make accommodations within mainstream settings (Deno, 1994). Deno (1970) addressed the need to provide services to children based on their need, regardless of special education eligibility. Furthermore, the services needed to be provided in the general education classroom, rather than in segregated classes or schools (Deno, 1970). Deno believed that the funding received by State Education Agencies (SEA) could be better used if both general and special educators were trained in working with students with special needs. She stated that children had a right to be treated according to their needs, not according to the convenience or budgetary advantage of service vendors (Deno, 1994). If the model for determining eligibility were based on individual children's needs, rather

than solely depending on federally defined eligibility criteria, African American students might not be placed in classes for those with an eligibility of mental retardation at such high rates.

Twenty-five years after having written her seminal article, Deno (1994) shared that special educators are not able to effectively put into practice systems to support students with special needs, because the administrative structure continues to be flawed, which contributes to the issue of overrepresentation (Deno, 1994). Several authors have written about disproportionality and overrepresentation such as Dunn (1968), Deno (1970, 1994), Artiles and Trent (1994), Patton (1998) and Blanchett (2006). Disproportionality continues to undermine the educational achievement of African American students, as noted by the U.S. Department of Education (2016). Within the State of California, disproportionality of African American students in special education programs is evident, based on data from the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS, 2016) in Table 1. Patton (1998) stated that African American students were being harmed by unjust arrangements, actions, and behaviors within the field of special education. Patton (1998) further asserted that "the persistent existence and perpetuation of the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education programs serves as counterforce against an ethic of caring" (p. 29). An ethic of caring is grounded in relationships. It requires all who are involved in education to treat African Americans and our culture with care and respect. If caring and respect were at the center of discussions regarding disproportionality, African Americans in general—and African American males in particular—would not be overrepresented in special education programs.

Table 1

Special Education Disproportionality of African American Students

	African American students as % of enrollment	African American males as % of enrollment	African American students % of SPED	African American % of high incidence eligibilities
State of California	5.8	2.98	8.64	9.64
County of Los Angeles	7.82	3.99	11.09	11.41
Los Angeles Unified School District	8.57	4.35	11.61	11.05

Disproportionality of African American Males in Special Education

While African American students as a whole are overrepresented in special education, there is a pattern in the literature of disproportionate placement of African American males in special education programs, in the categories of intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, and specific learning disability (Harry & Anderson, 1999; Watts & Erevelles, 2004). However, disaggregated special education data are unavailable by gender and eligibility at the district, state, or national level. African American males comprise a small percentage of the school-age population, yet when African American male students are found eligible for special education services, they are likely to be educated in settings that segregate them from their White peers (Fierros & Conroy, 2002), such as special day classes. The research also states that students with an eligibility of emotional disturbance are more likely to be educated in separate settings, apart from their nondisabled peers (Harry & Anderson, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). If

a Black male is eligible as a student with an emotional disturbance (ED), he is more often placed in an educational setting that is more restrictive than his White peer with the same eligibility (Harry & Anderson, 1999). One of the most restrictive placements where a student may receive special education services as a student, with an eligibility of emotional disturbance, is a non–public school setting (USDE, 2016). Harry and Anderson (1999) have found that the disproportionate placement of African American students in general—and African American males in particular—is due to the construction of disabilities that are reliant upon the judgment and perceptions of educators, based on developmental and behavioral norms identified by society.

Social Construction of High Incidence Disabilities and African American Students

Debates have ensued as to the reason why disproportionality exists. One reason for disproportionality is that the moral imperative to care, which requires the carer to nonselectively receive the cared-for, is missing from the educational arena (Noddings, 2005). Patton stated that the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education goes against the ethic of care.

Several scholars (Connor et al., 2016; Harry & Klinger, 2006) have found that disproportionality is the result of the social construction of disabilities, specifically the high incidence of intellectual disability (formally mental retardation), emotional disturbance, and specific learning disability. The disproportionate representation of students occurs in the high incidence disability categories of mental retardation (now intellectual disability), emotionally disturbed, and specific learning disability (Dunn, 1968). According to data by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2009), African American students continue to be placed in programs for the intellectually disabled as well as programs for students with an emotional

disturbance rate that is 1.5 times higher than all other racial groups (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2009). During the 2013–2014 school years, African American Students accounted for 16% of the students enrolled in public schools, but 15% of the Special Education population (USDOE, 2016).

The social construction of disabilities refers to the way in which disability categories are determined. The distinguishing factors are disabilities that are physiologically based versus disabilities that are determined by the developmental and behavioral norms of society (Harry & Anderson, 1999).

Social Construction of Intellectual Disability (ID)

The social construction of intellectual disability (formally mental retardation) has been made clear by the definitional changes that have occurred over the years (Connor et al., 2016; Harry & Anderson, 1999). Until 1973, the IQ score cutoff was 85 for mental retardation; however, the cutoff was lowered to an IQ score of 70, which meant that people who had formally been identified as mentally retarded were now cured and returned to average cognitive functioning (Harry & Anderson, 1999). Despite the change in criteria, African American students are three times more likely to be labeled intellectually disabled than their White peers (Connor et al., 2016), due to the biased assessment tools that are used to determine IQ.

Social Construction of Emotional Disturbance (ED)

The eligibility of emotional disturbance is devastating for African American males, as this category relies on observational data, teacher perceptions, and judgment (Harry & Anderson, 1999). A student must exhibit one of the five criterion of emotional disturbance (ED)/Emotional Behavior Disorder (BD) to receive services under the eligibility. The definition of an emotional

disturbance is a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time, and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance: (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; or (e) a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. Additionally, emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance (USDOE, 2016).

There is not a conclusive definition for the prerequisites, such as a long period of time or to a marked degree, which further leaves the decision up to the assessor. As a result of the varied criteria, African American students are two times more likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed than their White peers (Connor et al., 2016).

Social Construction of Specific Learning Disability (SLD)

With regard to the social construction of specific learning disability, there are multiple parts to the criterion for the eligibility of a specific learning disability. For the disproportionality debate, I shall describe both parts of the criteria. Part one of the criterion requires that there is a significant discrepancy between a student's cognitive ability and his or her academic achievement. Due to biases in intelligence testing, African American students score lower on IQ tests than White children, which reduced the likelihood that an African American student would be made eligible under the specific learning disability category, because their intelligence would not be considered average (Harry & Anderson, 1999). In addition to the discrepancy criteria, part

two is an exclusionary factor stating that the specific learning disability cannot be explained by environmental disadvantage. If the assessor believed that the home environment was contributing to a student's learning difficulties, then the student could not be eligible as a student with a learning disability (Harry & Anderson, 1999); however, for example, if a student was living in impoverished conditions for a long period of time, the student might be eligible under the emotional disturbance category.

Mercer (1973) addressed the validity of eligibility categories due to the differentiation of eligibilities that have a physiological basis, compared to those determined by societal norms of behavior and development. The social construction of high-incidence disabilities—such as intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, and specific learning disability—has continued to marginalize and oppress African American male students (Harry & Anderson, 1999). The educational community (including all educators, administrators, and school psychologists) must treat students as sacred, and embrace human relationships while working toward an ethic of care, to reduce the social construction of disabilities (Starratt, 1991). If all schools took such a stance, African American males would be the beneficiaries.

The Role of Care in Supporting Students with Special Needs

The theme of having caring teachers has been consistent across the research. However, there has been limited research with regard to the care of teachers in supporting students with special needs, and even less with respect to the care of teachers in supporting African American male students with special needs. This section will illuminate work regarding teacher care and students with special needs.

Morse (1994) specifically wrote about students with behavioral challenges, sharing that. in conversations with students regarding teacher practices, students would respond by saying that the teacher cared about the kids. Caring is vitally important in working with students with behavioral challenges, but is often neglected because of the need to maintain control (Morse, 1994). The task that educators of students with special needs have is to communicate caring to students so they know or feel cared about (Morse, 1994).

McIntyre and Battle (1998) conducted a study to determine what traits African American and Caucasian students identified with good teachers. The participants included in the study were 209 African American and Caucasian students with emotional and/or behavioral disorders (E/BD) who were placed in either special day classes on a traditional campus, or in a separate school. Of the four traits that were measured, African American students found that personality traits and respectful treatment of students were more important than their Caucasian counterparts did. Some of the traits identified in the two categories were that the teacher likes kids, is a nice person, is friendly, cares about you, listens to you, and respects your opinion. African American students viewed teachers who were caring as more important than did their Caucasian peers. The data for this study was not disaggregated by gender and ethnicity, and, as such, doesn't speak solely to the perceptions of African American males.

In a study conducted by Shaunessy and McHatton (2009), 577 students in grades nine through 12, who were either in general education, special education, or the honors program at a comprehensive high school, participated in focus groups and/or completed a 9-item survey to measure student perceptions of interactions with teachers. The results of the study indicated that students who received special education services felt that their teachers provided punitive

feedback more often than teachers of their peers in other programs, and they perceived a lack of connection with their teachers, which hindered learning and building relationships. This particular study did not solely address African American males, because the data were not disaggregated by gender and ethnicity.

Gatlin and Wilson (2016) conducted a study to determine what supported the academic success of African American students with disabilities. In order to participate in the study, the students had to be African American, have been identified as having a disability and requiring special education services, have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and have earned at least a 3.0 grade point average. Two female students became the participants. The teachers, parents, and students participated in semistructured individual interviews and completed surveys. Additionally, the researcher conducted observations. The findings of the study indicated that three themes emerged: expectations, support, and organization. With respect to support, the students said that the teachers stayed after school to help with schoolwork, even though they were not required to stay. This is consistent with the relational and academic views of caring previously described.

The research with regard to African American students, and African American males in particular, has addressed the concept of care and quality teacher-student relationships. However, there is a lack of research that has focused on teacher care in working with African American males with special needs in non-public school settings. If African American male secondary school students with special needs are to succeed academically and behaviorally, it is necessary to hear from them in their own voices, and allow them to share their experiences. The final section of the literature review addresses the need to develop a blended theoretical framework

that will assist in understanding the perspectives of African American male secondary school students who receive special education services in non-public school settings, and the care they receive from their teachers.

Theoretical Framework

While there is literature that speaks of students labeled with disabilities (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Blanchett, 2006; Deno, 1970, 1994; Dunn, 1968; Patton, 1998), the ethic of care in schools (Noddings, 1984; Starratt, 1991), and culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Howard, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1990, 1995), there is as yet no literature specifically addressing each concept with regard to support for African American male secondary school students with disabilities in non–public school settings. As a result, a blending of theories will be necessary in approaching the topic of care in supporting African American male secondary school students in special education. The goal of the research study is to understand the perspectives of African American males who receive special education services, and the care they receive from their teachers.

First, I will explore disability critical race studies (DisCrit), because African American males have historically been marginalized; and for those with the added label of disability, the intersectionality of race and disability further impacts their educational experiences. DisCrit is the foundation for the theoretical framework, because it places African American male secondary school students with special needs in non-public settings in the center.

Next, I will explore ethic of care theory, which is that caring between teachers and students plays an integral role in the success of students. Ethic of care theory is essential in identifying how African American males perceive teacher care, and whether or not that care is

consistent with the four components necessary for caring in schools as described by Noddings (2005): modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

Finally, I explore culturally relevant pedagogy, due to the connection to culture and its powerful influence in the lives of African American males. Ethic of care theory was an integral component of the development of culturally relevant pedagogy. Noddings's (1984) work on the ethic of care had been criticized as not being relevant for students of color. Ladson-Billings (1990) explored the pedagogical excellence of teachers who were successful in serving African American students, regardless of the ethnicity of the teacher. The three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy are a necessary component in the caring classroom, and the care of a teacher in the presentation of curriculum cannot be overlooked. In summary, the theoretical framework for this study blended DisCrit, the ethic of care, and culturally relevant pedagogy.

Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit)

In this section, I explain disability critical race studies (DisCrit) as well as the fourth tenet that will center the study. A brief background of critical race theory (CRT) and disability studies (DS) follows, as DisCrit emerges from the two aforementioned theories. Three authors collaborated to propose DisCrit as a theoretical framework that incorporates both race and ability. Connor et al. (2016) sought to keep race and ability in the forefront of their research, because they felt that critical race theory (CRT) and disability studies (DS) did not address the duality in education that many people of color were confronted with on a daily basis. For example, the overrepresentation of African American males in special education exemplifies the inequity that has been—and continues to be—perpetuated in our educational institutions.

Disability critical race studies (DisCrit) is a theoretical framework that finds its roots in critical race theory and disability studies. Connor et al. (2016) sought to extend CRT and DS in a way that would be useful, with the intention of helping educators to better understand how race and ability are intertwined (Connor et al., 2016). DisCrit theory in education addresses how race, racism, disability, and ableism invade all aspects of the educational institution impacting interactions, procedures, and discourses. DisCrit addresses how students of color with disabilities are impacted differently than White students with disabilities. Students of color with disabilities are segregated and receive unequal treatment in comparison to their White counterparts. White students with disabilities tend to be educated in general education settings, whereas students of color with disabilities are educated in settings that separate them from students without disabilities (Fierros & Conroy, 2002).

DisCrit does not solely address the challenges that students of color with disabilities experience in classrooms. DisCrit problematizes the binaries of normal/abnormal and abled/disabled in K–12 contexts, as well as in higher education and in published text (Connor et al., 2016). In the K–12 context, disabled students are separated from nondisabled students, according to institutional decisions, such as placing special education classrooms in the back of the building or in separate hallways. In higher education settings, schools of education often separate special education from general education when it comes to teacher preparation programs and curriculum and instruction (Young, 2011). Additionally, articles that are published on the topic of overrepresentation of students of color in special education are found in journals specifically for special education, whereas topics that are seen as general education topics are published in general education journals (Connor et al., 2016). DisCrit questions why the focus is

on what children with disabilities cannot do rather than focusing on their strengths. DisCrit calls into question the power structure that controls where the focus is placed as well as how that focus impacts education and society (Connor et al., 2016). In order to address some of the questions, the authors proposed the following seven tenets of DisCrit:

1. DisCrit is focused on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy.
2. DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity, such as race or disability or class or gender or sexuality, and so on.
3. DisCrit emphasizes the social constructions of race and ability, and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms.
4. DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research.
5. DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of disability and race, and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens.
6. DisCrit recognizes Whiteness and ability as property, and that gains for people labeled with disabilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of White, middle-class citizens.
7. DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance.

For the purpose of this study, the fourth tenet of DisCrit will be utilized to center the study. Tenet four is focused on changing the tradition of ignoring the voices of students who have been marginalized to provide insider voices. DisCrit does not seek to "give voice" to those

who have been marginalized, because they already have voice. Research that purports to "give voice" stands the risk of speaking for or about marginalized groups, therefore perpetuating a paternalistic view. DisCrit seeks to encourage the use of counter narratives to go against the master narrative (Connor et al., 2016; Matsuda, 1987). Connor et al. (2016) spoke of the importance for "readers to listen carefully and respectfully to counter narratives, and for researchers to use them as a form of academic activism to explicitly "talk back" to master narratives" (p. 22).

DisCrit was the center of the theoretical framework because the purpose of the study was to hear from African American male secondary school students with special needs in non-public school settings. The fourth tenet is focused on privileging the voices of the marginalized, which have not been acknowledged in the research. Data have not been disaggregated by ethnicity and gender; as a result, when research is conducted, African American males are categorized with African American females, who although are also overrepresented in special education programs, do not fair as poorly as African American male students. By providing a space for students to share their perspectives and experiences, I learn as the principal researcher how to better meet their needs, and what non-public schools can do differently to change the student experience.

In this section, I explained DisCrit as one component of the theoretical framework that is focused on the intersectionality of race and ability. The seven tenets of DisCrit serve as the foundation on which the theory is built for it to be useful as a framework in education. DisCrit found its origin in disability studies (DB) and critical race theory (CRT). The following section will provide a brief overview of both theories.

Disability Studies (DB)

The field of disability studies (DS) is focused on "how disability as a category was created to serve certain ends, and how the category has been institutionalized in social practices and intellectual conventions" (Linton, 2005, p. 518). People who have been labeled as disabled have been separated from society and marginalized due to a disability. The goal of disability studies is to weave people labeled as disabled back into society by exposing the ways that disability has been made exceptional (Linton, 2005). The field of disability studies does not, however, address the impact that race has on the label of disability. As a result, DisCrit seeks to address the intersectionality of race and disability.

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical race theory (CRT) has been described as "a radical legal movement that seeks to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). Within the institution of education, people of color—and African Americans, in particular—have been marginalized. Critical race theory (CRT) addresses four concepts: (a) racism is normal and, as such, it is necessary to unmask and expose racism in all forms (Bell, 1992); (b) CRT employs storytelling to analyze the idea of the common culture of race, which leaves Blacks and other minorities marginalized; (c) liberalism must be critiqued because racism requires sweeping changes, but liberalism allows for slow processes to gaining civil rights for people of color (Crenshaw, 1988); and (d) Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Connor et al. (2016), recognized that although CRT addresses race, it does not address the issue of ableism or disability.

Ideas and concepts of both disability studies and critical race theory have been utilized in the construction of DisCrit for the purpose of presenting a more holistic view of the intersectionality of race and disability. As stated earlier in this section, a blending of theories will be necessary in addressing the topic of supporting African American male secondary school students with special needs in non-public schools. In addition to DisCrit, ethic of care theory will be utilized in the framing of the study. The next section will provide the background of the ethic of care theory.

Ethic of Care

Carl Rogers (1975) wrote, "It is impossible accurately to sense the perceptual world of another person unless you value that person and his world – unless you in some sense care" (p. 6). Caring, in the African American community, has historically been a matter of survival, not just an act of compassion or benevolence. African Americans were dependent upon one another to provide support through times of injustice (Ward, 1995). When working with African American students, Ward suggested that care as a moral orientation has cultural dimensions that must not be ignored. Davis (2003) stated that African American males need to be cared for and nurtured in responsive schools. Patton (1998) states, "an ethic of caring requires that all persons involved in the education enterprise, whether they are researchers, administrators, special education teachers, college professors, or school psychologists, treat African Americans and their culture with caring and respect and hold them in absolute regard" (p. 29). I propose ethic of care theory as the second component of the theoretical framework to explore the perceptions of African American male secondary school students with special needs in non–public school settings.

In this section, I explain ethic of care theory based on the work of Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984, 2005). The concepts that describe the people who are part of the caring relationship within the ethic of care are described as the one who is caring and the one who is cared for. The great majority of this section will focus on moral education from the standpoint of the ethic of care. Noddings (1984) named four necessary components to implementing moral education: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Each component will be discussed further in this section.

Caring has been described as helping a person grow and actualize himself (Mayeroff (1979). Caring has also been described in terms of actions performed, such as taking care of someone who is ill (Noddings, 1984). Gilligan (1982) described the ethic of care as an ethic grounded in voice and relationships, the importance of everyone having a voice, being listened to carefully (in their own right and on their own terms), and being heard with respect. The ethic of care was grounded in democratic principles of everyone having a voice, and honoring the different voices of people (Gilligan, 1982). The relational view of caring that Noddings (1984) described involves engrossment and motivational displacement. Both concepts will be addressed in a later section. For the purpose of this study, the definition of caring that was used is the caring referred to by Noddings (2005), which is a connection or encounter between two human beings. Noddings built upon the work of Gilligan in looking at an ethic of care as a moral imperative in schools (Noddings, 1984). In describing the ethic of care, Noddings (1984) spoke of the one caring and the cared-for. In the school setting, the one caring would characterize the teacher, and the cared-for would describe the student. The following sections will further describe the one caring and the one cared-for.

The One Caring

The one caring is the person who is caring for someone else. In the case of schools, the one caring refers to the teacher. The concept behind the one caring is "feeling with" the other (Noddings, 1984). The idea of "feeling with" is to temporarily take on the feelings of the other. It is different from putting yourself in the other's shoes by analyzing how one would feel in a certain situation, but rather to receive the other person into yourself (Noddings, 1984). The concept known by another term is *engrossment*, which is to be absorbed or preoccupied by the other. Shevalier and McKenzie (2013) stated that when engrossment occurs for the other, the one caring experiences motivational displacement, which is the desire to help. Noddings (1984) described how the one caring receives the other and is in service to the other. The teacher is the one caring in the student-teacher relationship. The teacher receives the student as a human being, in a nonjudgmental way, caring for the student as a person, rather than focusing solely on the content in the classroom (Noddings, 2005). The student in the relationship is known as the cared-for. The relationship between the one caring and the cared-for is one of reciprocity (Noddings, 1984).

The Cared-For

The cared-for is the person on the receiving end of the caring. In the school setting, the one cared-for is the student (Noddings, 1984). The one caring (teacher) conveys a certain attitude that lets the one cared-for (student) know that she/he cares. The one caring is non-selectively present for the one cared-for. One of the ways the care is received by the other is through listening attentively. A classroom teacher receives a child, and commits to working with the child without trying to manipulate or mold the child into something else, but truly accepts the

child as he or she is (Noddings, 1984). Bronfenbrenner (1981) stated, "In order to develop, a child needs the enduring, irrational involvement of one or more adults in care and joint activity with the child" (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p.38). In other words, Bronfenbrenner (1981) described it as someone having to be crazy about the child. If the teacher is not crazy about the child, meaning, if there is no natural inclination to care, then the teacher must have a moral imperative to care by trying to provide an environment in which the child will experience affection, support, and attention, in hopes that the one cared-for (student) will respond, which would genuinely contribute to the reciprocity of the caring relationship (Noddings, 1984). The relationship between the one-caring and the one cared-for is integrally connected, requiring the engrossment of the one-caring, and the recognition and spontaneous response of the cared-for (Noddings, 1984). Caring is an ethic of relation; it is not one-sided (Noddings, 2005). Noddings (2005) described four necessary components to implementing caring in education: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation.

Modeling

The first component required in implementing caring in education is modeling, which is the action of showing students how to care. This is demonstrated by our relationships with the cared-for (Noddings, 2005). Teachers in the classroom learn how to become the one-caring for students when they are the cared-for in relationship to their administrator. The principal, who uses sarcasm and exhibits dictatorial actions will find it difficult to persuade teachers to be caring toward the students in their classes (Noddings, 2005). If the goal of education, as Noddings (1984) stated, is the maintenance and enhancement of caring, then teachers must model for students by creating caring relations with them. In the classroom climate, care as an ethic of

teaching refers to explicitly showing affective and nurturing behavior toward students, which can have a positive influence on students' desire to learn (Howard, 2001). Modeling also requires the one-caring to explain what is being done and why, when it comes to the student teacher interaction (Noddings, 2005). The explanation requires the one-caring and the cared-for to engage in dialogue.

Dialogue

The second component required in implementing caring in education is dialogue. Dialogue involves the genuine engagement of the other. It is open-ended and is entered into by both parties, without one person having an answer already in mind (Noddings, 2005). In the classroom, the one-caring cannot enter into dialogue with a student when the decision has already been made. Dialogue must be authentic. It is a common search for understanding. Each person engaged in dialogue has the opportunity to question without judgment, for the purpose of discovering answers together. Dialogue allows each person to gather information to make an informed decision (Noddings, 2005). Ultimately, "the purpose of dialogue is to come into contact with ideas and to understand, to meet the other and to care" (Noddings, 1984, p. 186).

In addition to making informed decisions, dialogue connects people and helps maintain the caring relationship. Dialogue also provides a foundation for gaining knowledge of one another, because each person is open and attentive to the other. In an effort to promote dialogue in schools, Noddings (1984) has suggested that educators be willing to engage in dialogue around topics that are important to the students, including topics that may be controversial. Students must be given the opportunity to critically examine values, beliefs, and opinions (Noddings, 1984). At the time of Noddings's writing on caring, morality was to be taught at

home and at church. Noddings believed that schools had an obligation to engage students and families in dialogue by focusing on the commonality of humanity, rather than on the professionalism of schooling (Noddings, 1984). Schools were to stay away from discussions centered around religion, but Noddings believed that dialogue around different religions, religious art, and the like would provide students with the opportunity to feel with the other and deepen the caring, while connecting with one another (Noddings, 1984). As the school community allows for dialogue to occur, students are given the opportunity to practice the development and maintenance of caring, which is the third essential component of caring school communities.

Practice

The third component required in implementing caring in education is practice. Practice is designed to teach specific skills, and to support the development of certain attitudes and ways of looking at the world (Noddings, 2005). The goal of a caring school is to provide shared efforts of caring by engaging students in service activities as part of the school day (Noddings, 1984). Students would be given the opportunity for apprenticeship work in caring by completing service hours in maintenance tasks, parks, animal shelters, hospitals, and the like (Noddings, 1984). The expectation would be on how the skills utilized in the service activity contributed to competence in caring. Students would not receive a grade for their participation in the community service or service learning activities, because students should not be in competition around caring. Instead, participation in these types of activities are used to enhance the maintenance of caring and to provide the opportunity for the cared-for to be the one caring (Noddings, 2005). Rather than students choosing a service activity as if choosing an elective course, the student might be

assigned to an activity for which he or she does not have a natural proclivity. In doing so, the students gain two things: a genuine respect for the various human talents and abilities of others, and a safe environment to risk new and difficult situations (Noddings, 1984). When there is a safe space, vulnerability makes caring easier and more natural, because students gain a better understanding of the other person (Noddings, 1984). In order to create environments of this sort, the hierarchical structure of schools that focus on rewards and penalties would need to be restructured to better accommodate the opportunity for practice (Noddings, 2005). Practice is a necessary component of caring in education. As students have the opportunity to practice caring, they also have the opportunity to affirm and encourage the best in others (Noddings, 2005). The affirmation and encouragement of others is confirmation, the final component.

Confirmation

The fourth and final component required for caring in education as described by Noddings is confirmation. Confirmation has been described as attributing the best possible motive to the cared-for (Noddings, 1984). In the act of confirmation, the one caring shows the cared-for an image of himself that is "lovelier than that manifested in his present acts" (Noddings, 1984, p. 193). In other words, the one caring must see and receive the other, see what the student has actually done, and receive the feelings with which it was done (Noddings, 1984). If the student makes a decision that is not helpful, the teacher does not act as if it did not happen, but rather through caring, shares with the student another picture of himself. For example, if a student is found cheating, the teacher thinks of all possible motives, and attributes the one that is a genuine possibility to the student by saying something like, "I know you were trying to accomplish a certain grade on this assignment." A statement such as this acknowledges the

decision that was made by showing the student a different view of the situation. The language used expresses the displeasure of the one-caring, while also letting the one cared-for see a self that is better than the act (Noddings, 2005). The act of confirmation by the one-caring has the power to nurture—or to destroy—the sense of caring within the student (Noddings, 1984). As the teacher provides confirmation for the students, the teacher is also in need of confirmation by administration. This confirmation comes in the form of modeling by administration. Confirmation depends on dialogue and practice. The components required for caring in education do not operate independently; rather, they work collectively to not only support students, but to support teachers as well (Noddings, 1984).

This section described the four components necessary to implement caring in education: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Noddings (2005) stated, "caring is the very bedrock of all successful education and that contemporary schooling can be revitalized in its light" (p. 27). As stated earlier in this review, the theoretical framework necessary in approaching the topic of care in supporting African American male special education students in non-public schools requires blending the following theories: DisCrit, ethic of care theory, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Ethic of care theory was foundational in guiding the development of culturally relevant pedagogy as a theory.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In this section, I will describe culturally relevant pedagogy, which is defined as a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Ladson-Billings (1995) also stated that culturally relevant pedagogy is "a theoretical model that not only

addresses student achievement, but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (p. 469). The section will begin with an overview of culturally relevant pedagogy, including the four components of Ladson-Billings's (1995) theoretical frame. Culturally relevant pedagogy is based on three broad suppositions: the conceptions of self and others, the manner in which social relations are constructed, and the conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Each of the suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy will be discussed further.

Theoretical Background of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1990) engaged in research to study the pedagogical excellence of successful teachers of African American learners. African American learners have historically been unsuccessful academically, and the literature has focused on deficit models (Brown, 2011; Fultz & Brown, 2008; Gardner & Mays, 2013). Ladson-Billings sought to address African American student success by observing the role of the teacher (Ladson-Billings, 1990). Ladson-Billings (1995) described the four components of the theoretical frame that emerged from the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1991), which she used to ground her study: concrete experiences as a criterion for meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims, the ethic of care, and the ethic of personal accountability.

The concrete experiences as a criterion of meaning was, as Collins (1991) stated, "recognizing that individuals who have lived through experiences for which they claim to be experts are more believable and credible than those who have merely read and thought about such experience" (p. 209). Ladson-Billings (1990) determined that the study would be conducted

in four phases: an ethnographic interview, observation, videotaping, and participation in a research collaborative. The first phase involved an ethnographic interview with African American parents, whom she considered to be experts because of their experiences with their students as well as the teachers. The input of the parents, as well as cross-referencing with administrators, determined which teachers would be asked to participate in the study. The first part of the concrete experiences component was met by interviews with the parents, but the second part was the reflections of teachers on what was most important in the daily teaching of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The second component utilized in the theoretical framing of the study was dialogue in assessing knowledge claims. Knowledge emerges as a dialectical relationship, not from one individual (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The qualitative study included eight teachers—five of whom were African American and three of whom were White. Each teacher that was a participant in the study was interviewed early on to gain a better understanding of the teacher's belief regarding education, and to glean information about family background. Additionally, each teacher was part of a research collaborative in which the data collected from classroom observations and videotaped interactions was reviewed by each teacher providing the opportunity to engage in reciprocal dialogue. As a result, teachers were able to make sense of their own practices as well as the practices of their colleagues (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The third component of the theoretical frame guiding the study was the ethic of care. The ethic of care based on the work of Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984) presented a feminist view of caring; but in the study, caring was based on the sense of commitment to what pedagogy can mean in the lives of people (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In the study, caring was defined as the

concern that teachers had for the implications that their work would have on the lives of their students, the welfare of the community, and dealing with injustice (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The fourth component of the theoretical frame undergirding the study was the ethic of personal accountability. Collins (1991) addressed the idea that the person who makes the knowledge claim is just as important as the claims of knowledge itself. Each of the teachers had to make decisions on what pedagogical stance they would take. For example, the individual commitment to their students caused them to make decisions in which they defied administration (Ladson-Billings, 1995), because they felt strongly about a specific practice and the implication it had for African American students.

Each of the components of the theoretical frame guided the study, and from the results emerged a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As stated earlier in this section, there are three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy: conceptions of self and others, the manner in which social relations are constructed, and the conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The remainder of this section will elaborate further on each of the suppositions.

Conceptions of Self and Others

The first supposition that emerged from the study was conceptions of self and others. The theme across classrooms was that a teacher who practiced culturally relevant methods saw themselves as professionals, and they strongly identified with teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994). These teachers believed that all of the students in their classes were capable of academic success; their practices were unpredictable and always in the process of becoming; they were members of the community; teaching was a way to give back to the community (Ladson-Billings, 1995); and

they believed in the Freirean notion of pulling knowledge out (Freire, 2000). Practical examples of this theme were evident in the teachers' classrooms.

One of the ways teachers demonstrated commitment to their beliefs was that they would not allow students to choose failure in their classrooms. The language used in referring to the students was never language regarding lack, but it centered on the high expectations that were held for each student (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Additionally, teachers challenged the assumptions of students in order to help them critically question the dominant narratives. For example, when a student had the idea that only White women with long blonde hair could be princesses, one teacher spontaneously inserted the use of an African folktale into her lesson in an effort to engage the students in dialogue (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Another demonstration of commitment is that many of the teachers lived in the community in which their schools were located, and therefore they were part of the community. The teachers who did not live in the area frequently went to the neighborhood to do their shopping. The act of choosing to live within the community, or to frequent the community, was again to challenge assumptions of the students that a person would have to move out of the community to do better, rather than to be part of the reclamation of the community (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The Manner in Which Social Relations are Constructed

The second supposition that emerged from the research study was the manner in which social relations are constructed. Teachers who engage in culturally relevant methods consciously create social interactions that help students become academically successful, culturally competent, and critically conscious (Ladson-Billings, 1995). All of the teachers in the study demonstrated the following: they maintained fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrated

connectedness with all of the students, developed a community of learners, and encouraged students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The behaviors were noted across classrooms. In each of the classrooms in the study, at some point, the teacher assumed the role of student and the student became the teacher. By choosing to give students the opportunity to teach, teachers recognized that the expertise of the individual students could be used for the greater good of the classroom community (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The teachers also encouraged a community of learners, rather than individual competition. Therefore, students understood that, in their classes, they helped one another by quizzing each other, using a buddy system to support students when they were absent, and focusing on the fact that the classroom was a family. One teacher in the study stated, "We have to care for one another as if our very survival depended on it. Actually, it does!" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 481).

Conceptions of Knowledge

The third supposition that emerged from the research study was conceptions of knowledge. The theme indicated how teachers thought about the curriculum or content that they taught, as well as how they would assess the gained knowledge of the students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The teachers in the study believed that knowledge was not static, but was shared, recycled, and constructed. They believed that knowledge must be viewed critically, that students must be passionate about knowledge and learning, that teachers must scaffold to facilitate learning, and that assessment must be multifaceted, providing opportunities for multiple forms of excellence (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

The classroom teachers observed as part of the study provided the students with opportunities to construct and share their knowledge by choosing their areas of expertise and preparing a presentation for the class. Another teacher used popular music to gain the interest of the students, but to also get them to view critically the words and meanings of the songs. When there were students who did not understand concepts, the teachers understood that building bridges or scaffolding was necessary, not because the students were not capable of understanding, but because sometimes students required a link to the knowledge in order for them to better understand. The teachers taught their students to question what they were told and not to blindly accept something because the teacher said so. However, the teachers helped the students to understand the difference between an intellectual challenge and a challenge to authority (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The three suppositions that emerged from the study became the theoretical perspective of culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) focused on African American students in the work around culturally relevant pedagogy, because so little of the good teaching expected to occur in classrooms was occurring in classrooms populated by African American students. "Culturally relevant pedagogy is designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling, and society" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 483). Each of the teachers in the study shared a common feature in that their classroom practice was grounded in the belief of the educability of every student.

This section provided an overview of culturally relevant pedagogy, including the four theoretical underpinnings as part of the work of Collins (1991) on Black feminist thought: concrete experiences as a criterion for meaning, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge

claims, the ethic of care, and the ethic of personal accountability. The section concluded with the three suppositions that became the theoretical perspective of culturally relevant pedagogy: the conceptions of self and others, the manner in which social relations are constructed, and the conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Each of the theories described above—DisCrit, ethic of care, and culturally relevant pedagogy—blended to develop the theoretical framework used in the study to understand the perspectives of African American males who received special education services in specialized settings, and the care they receive from teachers and other school staff.

The fourth tenet of DisCrit is the foundation for the theoretical framework, because it places African American male secondary school students with special needs in non-public settings in the center. African American males have historically been marginalized, and for those with the added label of disability, the intersectionality of race and disability further impacts their educational experiences. Tenet four privileges the voices of the marginalized, which have been left out of research. Nieto (1994) stated that student perspectives on their learning environments reveal the challenges and pain that young people feel when schools are unresponsive and cold places. Research has been conducted to hear what adults believe it means to provide a caring environment, but student voice gives space for African American males to speak to their experiences and affect change.

The second component of the theoretical framework is the ethic of care. Literature has found that caring between teachers and students plays an integral role in the success of students. I believe ethic of care theory is essential to identifying how African American males perceive the care that is received, and whether or not that care is consistent with the four components

described by Noddings (2005): modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. The ethic of care is grounded in relationship. The student perspective is important to glean if students feel cared for in their classrooms. Do the teachers non-selectively receive the students and demonstrate the desire to help even when the student may not reciprocate the caring? The students are the only ones who can provide this information based on their educational experiences.

The third and final component of the theoretical framework for this study was culturally relevant pedagogy. As teachers have been unsuccessful in engaging African American male students with special needs in the learning experience, it is important to determine from the student perspective whether or not the teacher in the classroom empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Knowing that culturally relevant pedagogical practices are connected to culture and its powerful influence in the lives of African American males, it is important to explore student perception. While ethic of care theory was an integral component in the development of culturally relevant pedagogy, Noddings's (1984) work on the ethic of care has been criticized as not being relevant for students of color. Ladson-Billings (1990) explored the pedagogical excellence of teachers who were successfully serving African American students, regardless of the ethnicity of the teacher. By including culturally relevant pedagogy as part of the theoretical framework, students shared the extent to which the ethic of care was demonstrated in the classroom through culturally relevant practices. The three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy are a necessary component in the caring classroom, and the care of a teacher in the presentation of curriculum cannot be overlooked. In fact, culturally relevant educators show care through the concern that they have regarding how their work empowers students to deal with

injustice in school and in their communities. A blending of the three theories—DisCrit, the ethic of care, and culturally relevant pedagogy—is important to explore the perceptions of African American male secondary school students, with respect to the care shown by their teachers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the key features of interviewing as a research methodology, and explain why interviewing is the most appropriate methodology for this study. I will include the contextual setting of the research, as well as the process for identifying, selecting, and contacting the student participants. In addition, I will outline the study and provide descriptions and samples from the interview protocol. Finally, I will present the strategies for data collection and data analysis.

Interviewing as a Methodology

Interviewing is one of the major methodological approaches utilized in qualitative research. Tillman (2002) stated that interviewing, as a methodology, is a culturally sensitive research approach when working with African American students. The purpose of interviewing as a methodology is to analyze the participant's experience (Flick, 2014). Interviewing allows the researcher to gain information that might not be gleaned from an observation (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). Interviews provide the researcher with background information based on the questions that are asked as part of the interview. The background information provides insight with regard to attitudes, interests, feelings, concerns, and perceptions. Interviews can vary from formal to informal, based on the information the researcher is seeking (Gay et al., 2011).

Based on the research questions that were employed in this study, I utilized the responsive interview approach, which has been described by Rubin and Rubin (2012) as a style of qualitative interviewing that, "emphasizes the importance of building a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee that leads to more give and take in the conversation" (p.

37). Implementing a responsive interview style supported the interviewee feeling comfortable, and created a setting conducive to supporting and trusting the interviewer, rather than having the interviewee feel like a subject for study. The fourth tenet of disability critical race theory (DisCrit), which is the foundation of the study, is to privilege the voices of marginalized populations that are not acknowledged in research (Connor et al., 2016). African American male students have been the objects of research, but rarely are their voices part of the research. Interviewing created an opportunity for their voices to be part of the research in an effort to address the following research questions:

1. How do African American male secondary students define care?
2. To what extent do African American males' perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experiences?
3. Based on student perceptions, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher?
4. How are the suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher, according to African American males perceptions?

To hear from the students in their own voices, I employing a semistructured interview technique. Semistructured interviews combine both the structured and unstructured interview approach. The semistructured interview was based on a mostly open-ended question format that guided both the interviewer and the interviewee (Flick, 2014). The open-ended format allowed for the gathering of information that might not otherwise be addressed by a closed interview format requiring only yes or no answers (Gay et al., 2011). Since the research study took place at my school, I, as the researcher, entered the space with the understanding of self and others that Ladson-Billings

(1994) described as the belief that all students are capable of academic success, and with a willingness to connect with each participant to establish rapport and trust.

The study required three semistructured interviews and a member checking session. The first semistructured interview addressed basic information, such as the participant's self-selected pseudonym and background information regarding school experiences prior to enrolling in non-public school. A couple of the questions asked were: (a) How long have you been enrolled in your current non-public school? (b) Can you share about your educational experiences before you were enrolled in non-public school? The purpose of the first interview was to learn background information about the participant, as well as build rapport.

The second semistructured interview addressed the first two research questions. Each participant had the opportunity to define care. A question asked during the second interview included: Can you share a time when you were in class and you felt that the teacher cared about you? By breaking up the interviews, the hope was to decrease interview fatigue among participants.

The third semistructured interview focused on the third and fourth research questions that addressed the theoretical framework. Some of the interview questions were: (a) How, if at all, does the behavior of your teacher(s) influence you to care for others? (b) Tell me about your interactions/dialogue with your teacher. (c) What if anything about those interactions demonstrate caring? For a complete list of questions, please see the interview protocols in Appendix E. Each of the interviews was less than 1 hour in length.

Contextual Setting

Non-Public School Settings

The study included students from one non-public school within the greater Los Angeles area. Non-public schools are private schools certified by the state to contract with Local Education Agencies (LEAs) to provide special education services to students who have not been successfully served in traditional school programs. Non-public schools are sometimes seen as alternative schools in the sense that students who are enrolled are oftentimes placed due to inappropriate behavior. Dunbar (1999) conducted a study in an alternative school where the students were labeled as incorrigible, social misfits, violent, and super-predators. The purpose of this study was to include the voices of students who are largely left out of reform efforts in schools (Dunbar, 1999). Each student who was interviewed represented a different perspective based on his lived experiences.

The non-public school represented in the study served African American male secondary school students. At the time of the study, I was the administrator of the school. The school will be described below, followed by the process employed to identify participants for the study. Within the non-public school setting involved in the study, there were a high percentage of African American male students who were eligible under the high incidence categories of emotional disturbance, or specific learning disability (Fierros & Conroy, 2002). All study participants were eligible under the category of emotional disturbance (ED) or other health impairment (OHI).

Data generated by the California Department of Education (CDE) provide percentages of students receiving special education services, but there is not disaggregated data for African

American males. However, based on the review of literature on disproportionality (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Blanchett, 2006; Deno, 1970, 1994; Dunn, 1968; Patton, 1998), and the population of African American males in the study, one could infer that African American males are disproportionately represented in non-public school settings.

In the State of California, African American students make up 5.8% of the school-age population. African American students account for 8.64% of students with special needs; however, 15.1% of African American students with special needs are eligible under the category of emotional disturbance. African American students make up 19% of the student enrollment in non-public schools, according to the California Department of Education (CDE, 2016). African American males make up only 2.98% of the school-age population in the State of California (CDE, 2016).

The school in which the study took place was located within the greater Los Angeles area. A description of the school population will follow, along with Table 2, which summarizes the demographics of the school represented in the study.

Victory School

A pseudonym was utilized for the school name to provide anonymity. Victory was located within a large school district serving in excess of 600,000 students. Victory served approximately 250 students with special needs. Fifty-one percent of the students were eligible under the category of emotional disturbance. Twenty-seven percent were students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The school enrollment was comprised of 49% African American students and 47% Latino students. African American males were 17% of the school population. Of the African American males enrolled in the school, 49% were students eligible

under one of the high incidence eligibilities of emotional disturbance (ED), or specific learning disability (SLD). Seventy-four percent of enrolled students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Victory services students between the ages of five and 22. For the purposes of this study, the focus was on the middle and high school students who made up the secondary school population ranging from ages 13 and 18. School demographic information was collected from the School Accountability Report Card (SARC) with 2015-16 data reported.

Table 2

Demographic Information of Victory School

Non-Public School	Percentage of African American students enrolled	Percentage of African American males enrolled	Percentage of African American males eligible under a high incidence eligibility (ED, SLD, ID)	Percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch meals or low income
Victory School	49	17	49	74

Participants

Participants for the study were African American males in the secondary grades (between ninth and twelfth grade). The Director of Education/principal for the non-public school was responsible for recruitment of participants as the principal investigator. As the Director, I provided information to the governing entity of the organization to receive approval to conduct the study in the school. Although the governing board granted approval for the study, the recruitment of participants did not occur until after I received IRB approval.

Working with Minors

Due to the fact that the study utilized interviewing of students as a method and that the target population was students with special needs, I was responsible for obtaining consent from the parents/guardians for participation of the minor students, as well as assent from the students themselves for participation.

Outreach to Parents/Guardians of Participants

All African American male students enrolled in Victory non-public school between the grades of nine and 12 received a flyer to take home to their parents/guardians providing information about the study. An informational meeting was scheduled to explain the study to the parents/guardians. Students who were 18 years of age or older and were holders of their educational rights would not be required to have consent from their parents/guardians. The students in the non–public school selected were eligible under the categories of emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, or other health impairment. The students who were eligible to participate in the study exhibited average cognitive ability, but received services in the non–public setting due to behavioral concerns. It was expected that, based on their average cognitive ability, students who were 18 years of age or older were able to make educational decisions for themselves. However, there were no students over the age of 18 who were eligible to participate in the study based on their low-to-below-average cognitive ability. Parents/guardians were given an opportunity to participate in the orientation meeting via conference call if they were unable to attend in person. During the orientation meeting, the purpose of the study was discussed as well as the voluntary nature. Refer to Appendix A for the Letter of Informed Consent and Appendix D for the Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights. The

parents/guardians in attendance were provided information, including the fact that if they chose to not allow their students to participate in the study, there would be no adverse affect on the student's enrollment in the school. This point was particularly important for parents of students at Victory School, as I served as both the principal investigator and the Director of Education/principal. The parents were also informed that if they changed their minds about the student participating in the study, they had the right to prohibit continued involvement.

Upon answering all questions during the orientation meeting, I distributed an information sheet to the parents regarding the study as well as the consent forms for participation to be completed by a specified deadline, which was one week from the orientation date. The initial outreach to families did not yield at least 10% of the African American male secondary student population; as a result, I employed secondary outreach efforts, which entailed contacting parents/guardians individually via telephone and email. I found this method to be most beneficial, as some parents/guardians did not feel comfortable discussing the study information in a larger group setting. When I contacted the parents/guardians, I asked if they preferred that I send the information via email, with the student, or via postal mail. I answered all questions that parents/guardians had and provided the materials, including the consent forms based on the preferred method, with a two-day timeline for return of the signed consent form.

Recruitment of Participants

After receiving consent forms from the parents/guardians, I conducted an outreach to all of the students for whom consent was provided with an invitation to meet with me individually for an orientation meeting. Initially the orientation meeting was to be a group meeting but due to the response of parents/guardians, I chose a more personal approach. The individual meeting did

not draw attention to any one student in particular. At the orientation meeting, the purpose of the study was discussed as well as its voluntary nature. Students were assured that if they chose to not participate in the study, there would be no adverse affect on their enrollment at the school. This was a particularly important point for the students, since I serve as both principal investigator and Director of Education/principal for the school. I informed the students that the interviews would be audio recorded, in order to provide a verbatim account of each interview. Students were told that when they provided assent to participate in the study, they were also agreeing to have the interview audio recorded. The participants learned that the one-to-one semistructured interviews would be approximately 1 hour in length, and that the interviews would take place in my office, to provide privacy and maintain confidentiality. Additionally, the interviews were scheduled during an elective period so the students were not missing core curriculum instructional time, or during a portion of the lunch or break period. I also told them that after all three interviews had been completed, we would meet again for member checking, where they would receive a copy of the transcription for review, and have the opportunity to amend the transcription if necessary. Upon answering all of the students' questions, students were provided with a short summary of the study as well as an assent form to sign. Each of the participants immediately signed the assent form. Once assent as obtained, the participants were asked for the best time to meet for the interviews, and we scheduled tentative meeting times.

The goal for the participant pool of the study was to interview a minimum of five students. If the number of assent forms totaled more than five, the students' names would have been pulled from a bowl to identify six to eight participants. Although the goal was to interview a minimum of five students, the hope was to receive assent from more than five students due to

student attrition that might have occurred during the time of the study. At the end of the recruitment phase, six parents/guardians provided consent but one student declined to participate and as a result, the number of participants was five.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

As part of the orientation, students learned that their participation would remain confidential. It was explained to them that the consent documents containing the student information would be maintained in a locked file cabinet that only I had access to, in order to ensure confidentiality. Additionally, students expected anonymity by self-selecting a pseudonym to be used in the remaining phases of the study.

To further maintain the anonymity of the participants, any data pertaining to that student were stored under the pseudonym. Additionally, the audio recordings and transcriptions were stored under the participant's pseudonym. The audio recordings were uploaded to my personal computer that is password-protected, and at the conclusion of the study, the information was stored on a CD and permanently erased from the computer. The transcription information was also transferred to the CD. The CD was placed in a locked file cabinet, to which I have the only key for access. My faculty sponsor also kept a copy of the data file in a locked cabinet in her office on campus. At the conclusion of the study, the results were presented at a conference and may be published in journals.

Compensation for Participation

Students in the non–public school setting routinely receive incentives for participation within the school setting. As part of the study and being consistent with this practice, students were told that they would receive a $5 gift card for their participation in the study, which they

received at the conclusion of the study. Each participant would have received a $5 Target gift card, whether or not they completed all of the interviews. All five of the participants completed each of the three interviews.

Data Collection

Data Collection Timeline

Upon receiving IRB approval, the recruitment of participants began, including outreach to parents/guardians, and students. Data were collected from mid-October through mid-December 2017. The timeline for data collection was three months because not all students who agreed to participate in the study attended school daily, which required a change in the interview schedule. As a result, the collection of data followed a schedule that took into account the special circumstances of each participant.

Method of Data Collection

The method that was employed for data collection was the semistructured individual interview. There were three choices for collecting data: writing notes during the interview, recording an audio or video of the interview, or writing notes after the interview (Gay et al., 2011). The method that I chose was to audiotape the student interviews to have a verbatim account of each interview. I did not take notes during the interviews, because taking notes during the interviews can be a distraction to the person being interviewed, as well as the interviewer (Gay et al., 2011). Following each interview, notes were taken on anything that may have been said or done that would assist in data analysis or provide insight into the participant's experience. Each of the five students participated in three semistructured interviews lasting up to 1 hour. Although observations and interviews complement one another in research, the purpose of the

study was to hear the voices of the students, and for this reason, this particular study solely focused on the individual semi-structured interviews (Gay et al., 2011). After completion of the work with each participant, the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription service. The transcription served the purpose of field notes (Gay et al., 2011).

Data Analysis

The aim of this qualitative study was to gain student perceptions describing the care that African American male secondary school students in non–public school settings receive from their teachers. Flick (2014) stated that the analysis of qualitative data can be for the purpose of describing a phenomenon, explaining differences, or developing a theory. I was interested in better understanding how the care of a teacher affected the educational experiences of African American male secondary students in the non-public school setting. Data analysis requires the researcher to read between the lines, and also to interpret what the participant did not say.

I employed a thematic analysis approach following the collection of data from this study. Braun and Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. A priori coding was utilized because I approached the analysis from a theoretical or "top down" manner. Based on the theoretical framework that guided this study, I was specifically searching for patterns from within the four components of care and the three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy. Braun and Clarke identified a six-step process for thematic analysis that served as the guidepost for data analysis in the study. A description of the process for analyzing the data collected including the steps for thematic analysis will be described below.

Data Management

I conducted three semistructured interviews with each of the participants for a total of the 15 semistructured interviews, which were recorded and professionally transcribed. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, the students chose a pseudonym, and any data pertaining to that student were stored under that name. Additionally, the audio recordings and transcriptions were stored under the participant's pseudonym. The audio recordings were uploaded to my personal computer that is password-protected. Upon receiving the completed transcripts, each transcript was printed and placed in a binder with tabs for each participant and each interview. I found that method to be an effective way of managing the data.

At the conclusion of the study, the information was stored on a CD and permanently erased from the computer. The transcription information was transferred to the CD. The CD was placed in a locked file cabinet to which the researcher has the only key for access. My faculty sponsor kept a copy of the data file in a locked cabinet in her office on campus. At the conclusion of the study, the results from the study might be published in journals or presented at conferences.

Organization of Data Collected

Flick (2014) has suggested that before you can begin to analyze data, you must prepare and organize the data. In order to prepare for data analysis, I began by reading each transcript multiple times, initially to determine that the transcription was correct and to fill in any gaps by carefully reviewing the transcript along with the audio of each interview. The first step of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006) is to familiarize yourself with your data. By carefully reading the transcripts, I was able to begin to mark notes for coding. I used large

chart paper to create the data analysis tool in Table 3, so that I could place Post It notes in the boxes as ideas and thoughts emerged. The table provided a means of organizing the data in a way that also protected the anonymity of the participants.

As I entered step two of thematic analysis, I began to generate initial codes. Again, the codes were theory driven. Although I began with initial codes, other codes emerged. I manually coded the data and utilized highlighters to distinguish between the codes. At this point, I also created tables for each research question on the computer where I could easily copy and paste directly from the transcript to place the coded information together. Step three of thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) entailed searching for themes. During this phase, I utilized chart paper to create mind maps where I was able to make connections between different codes and combine codes into themes. At this point, I identified 10 themes. Step four of thematic analysis requires two levels to review and refine the themes. The first level is to review the coded extracts for each theme to determine whether or not a coherent pattern exists (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I was engaged in this process, I determined that two of the themes were redundant because there was overlap of concepts. As a result, I combined two themes for a total of nine themes. Braun and Clarke stated that if a coherent pattern exists, then the second level requires a review of the themes with respect to the entire picture of the data set. For example, each of the themes points back to the literature with regard to the importance of care in the educational experiences of the students.

The fifth step of thematic analysis was to define and name themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that if the themes are clearly defined, the theme can be described in a couple sentences. The sixth and final step of thematic analysis is to write the findings. Based on the data

analysis, I was able to support the findings of the study with the literature on the topic. I found the process to be effective and efficient in working with the data generated by the interviews that had been conducted.

Table 3

Data Analysis Tool

Participant Pseudonym	Background Information	RQ 1 & 2 Define Care	RQ 1 & 2 Care and Educational Experiences	RQ 3 Ethic of Care	RQ 4 CRP
Jay					
James					
"A"					
Clouse					
Kae					

Criteria for Trustworthiness

Validity has historically been linked to quantitative research (Gay et al., 2011). In qualitative studies, the researcher seeks to validate whether or not the data accurately measures what it was intended to measure. Qualitative research aims to facilitate trustworthiness and an understanding of the research findings (Gay et al., 2011). Guba (1981) named four strategies in assessing trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Table 4 provides a summary of the strategies that were employed to ensure trustworthiness within the research study.

Credibility

Credibility indicates the researcher's ability to explain patterns that emerge, taking into account the various complex situations that surface during a study (Guba, 1981). Within the study, there were various practices implemented in an effort to establish credibility, including conducting member checks, utilizing peer de-briefing, and collecting documents such as audio recordings (Guba, 1981).

Member checks. Upon completion of the interviews with the students, member checks were necessary to check the report directly with the source to ensure that the data gathered during the collection phase was correct. Guba (1981) stated, "The process of member checks is the single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion" (p. 85). After the transcription was completed, I met a fourth time with each participant to provide an opportunity to review and amend the transcription. I read the transcription to the students who wanted to have the information read to them, to ensure that they understood the information. The member checking process provided an opportunity for the participants to share

with me as the principal investigator if there was something that I captured incorrectly, or if there was something stated that was not unclear. Each of the participants felt that the information that they provided during each of the interviews was accurate representations of their thoughts. In privileging the voices of the students, member checking was an integral process to ensure that the participants' thoughts and ideas were correctly captured.

Peer debriefing. As part of the study, I kept a journal of activity regarding the various components of the study. The purpose of the journal was to document my thoughts, questions, and insights during the study. I held regular meetings with my doctoral chair throughout the study in an effort to expose my thinking, and to be challenged in my assumptions. Guba (1981) has suggested that the peer debriefings be a time to deal with questions that may be posed by the faculty. During the analysis and writing of the findings, I met with my doctoral committee to share my insights and to get feedback based on questions that I had. The insight gained from the peer debriefings provided guidance throughout the analysis of the data to ensure the integrity of the theoretical framework.

Collection of Documents

Interviews were conducted with the students at the school site. Each interview was audio recorded to provide a verbatim account of the interactions. As part of the credibility protocol, Guba (1981) stated that it is important to have the information for future testing of interpretations gathered during the study. The information was stored on a CD with pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of the participants. Going forward, the information is available to review for further studies. Credibility is one aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Transferability is the applicability or generalizability of the study in qualitative terms.

Transferability

Transferability may occur between various contexts based on the similarities of the contexts. Phenomena are tied to a particular time and context (Guba, 1981). For example, the study was conducted within a specific context. The extent to which transferability occurs depends on the similarities that are found to exist. Based on the interpretations gathered from the study, a working hypothesis may develop that can be transferred to other contexts, depending on similarities (Guba, 1981). Strategies that were employed during the study are theoretical/purposive sampling and the development of thick descriptions of context.

Theoretical/purposive sampling. Theoretical/purposive sampling is intended to include a range of participants in an effort to uncover as much information as possible. The sampling method is not intended to yield a representative sample (Guba, 1981). Because the African American males who participated in the study came from various neighborhoods, the participants exhibited differences and similarities in their educational experiences, thereby providing a range of information. The background data that was gathered during the interviews were helpful in determining similarities that may be noted in other contexts.

Collect and develop thick descriptions. As part of the study, information that was recorded in the journal was contextual information about the various interviews. By keeping descriptive notes and making them available as part of the study, other inquirers will be able to determine whether or not the descriptions “fit” each other's context enough to where transferability could be contemplated (Guba, 1981). By interviewing participants on multiple occasions, I was able to gather deep descriptions of the participants' lives. The third area used to

determine trustworthiness in qualitative research is dependability. Dependability describes the stability or reliability of the data.

Dependability

Guba (1981) described two strategies that can be utilized to establish dependability in a qualitative study. One of the strategies is to overlap methods. As stated previously, based on the research questions of hearing the voices of African American males regarding their perceptions of the care received from their teachers, I opted to solely focus attention on the semistructured interview. As a result, I did not overlap methods. However, the second strategy is to establish an audit trail.

Audit trail. The establishment of an audit trail is taken from the finance world and is used as a metaphor. The purpose is for someone outside of the study to examine the notes that were taken, the transcription, and the journal to comment on the procedures that were used, and on whether or not they were acceptable practice (Flick, 2014; Guba, 1981). The focus of the dependability audit is to review the process employed. In this study, my chair was responsible for conducting the audit trail. I met with my committee chair often during the process to discuss procedures and challenges to ensure the integrity of the process.

The final aspect of establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is confirmability. Confirmability describes the neutrality or objectivity of the data collected (Guba, 1981).

Confirmability

Confirmability seeks to reduce the researcher's bias by shifting from the concept of researcher objectivity toward data confirmability (Guba, 1981). Guba has described two

strategies to support confirmability: triangulation and practicing reflexivity. For this study, I employed practicing reflexivity.

Practicing reflexivity. Reflexivity involves revealing my biases or assumptions as a researcher in the formulation of questions, or in the presentation of findings (Gay et al., 2011; Guba, 1981). As stated previously, a journal was utilized to document my thoughts, biases, assumptions, and insights that arose during the study. It was important for me to document any shift in my orientation as the research was progressing. Guba suggested that a confirmability audit should be conducted after the completion of the study. The purpose of the audit is to look at the data to determine whether data support each interpretation, and that the interpretations are consistent with the available data. The confirmability audit differs from the dependability audit, because the confirmability audit is focused on the product, whereas the dependability audit is focused on the process (Guba, 1981). Again, my doctoral chair was available throughout the process to ensure that the interpretations that were made were consistent and based on the data that was generated.

Table 4

Criteria for Trustworthiness Utilized in the Study

Credibility	Transferability	Dependability	Confirmability
• Member Checks • Peer Debriefing • Collection of Documents	• Theoretical/Purposive Sampling • Collect and Develop Thick Descriptions	• Audit Trail	• Practicing Reflexivity

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the key features of interviewing as a research methodology. It provided an explanation of why interviewing was the most appropriate methodology for this study, based on the research questions. I outlined the contextual setting of the research, as well as the process for identifying, selecting, and contacting the student participants. A description of the study was provided; and finally, I presented the strategies for data collection and data analysis. The trustworthiness of qualitative research was included as part of the data analysis section as well. The study sought to hear the voices of African American males as they shared their perceptions of the care they receive from teachers in the non-public school setting. Interviewing as a methodology was the best way to privilege the voices of students who had been marginalized and not acknowledged in the research (Connor et al., 2016).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Background

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to listen to the voices of African American male students with disabilities in specialized secondary educational settings to better understand how the care of a teacher had supported them in their educational experience. Additionally, this study sought to gain insight and make recommendations as to how to best meet the needs of this specific group of students. Three semistructured individual interviews were conducted with each of the five participants to address the following research questions:

1. How do African American male secondary students with special needs define care?
2. To what extent do African American males' secondary students with special needs perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experiences?
3. Based on African American male secondary students with special needs perceptions of care, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher?
4. How are the three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher, according to African American male secondary students with special needs perceptions?

A priori coding was utilized to analyze the data. Thematic analysis was employed because initial coding was based on the research questions. From each research question, primary codes were established. Based on the synthesis of the codes, nine themes emerged from the data. The chapter is structured by the major themes that emerged. The themes are addressed based on the research

question from which they emerged. The chapter begins with the context of the study, including information on Victory School and participant narratives followed by a brief section on the commonalities noted in the participant narratives before presenting the data gathered during the interviews.

Victory School

As stated previously in Chapter 3, Victory School was located within the boundaries of a large school district and served approximately 250 students with special needs. Victory had just under 150 staff comprised of teachers, teacher's assistants, clinicians who held either an MSW or MFT license, and other related services personnel such as speech language pathologists and occupational therapists, adult assistants, behavior staff, administrators, and back office staff. Each staff member had a unique role to play in supporting the students on the campus. Of the twenty-four classrooms, 18 teachers held full special education credentials to provide services to students with either mild/moderate or moderate/severe disabilities. Four teachers held internship credentials leading toward special education credentials to serve students with mild/moderate disabilities, and two teachers were provisional intern permit holders. The teachers did not hold single subject or multiple subject credentials. All support staff, such as teachers' assistants and behavior staff, either held a bachelor's degree or had completed a minimum of 48 college credits. The majority of the staff at Victory had been on staff for a minimum of 3 years and about 10% of the staff had been at Victory for 10 years or more.

Participant Narratives

The participants for this study were five African American male high school students who attended Victory Non-Public School in the greater Los Angeles area. Each of the

participants had an individualized education plan (IEP) that specified that non-public school placement was the least restrictive environment based on their present levels of performance and need for support. At the beginning of the study, each participant self-selected a pseudonym that would be used through each phase of the study. Participants were given the opportunity to change their pseudonyms at the start of each interview session. Out of respect for the participants as well as the process, the self-selected pseudonym is used. One participant chose to use a single initial as his pseudonym. As a result, quotations will be used when referring to the participant "A" throughout this document. Likewise, pseudonyms were assigned to any teacher referenced in the document.

Table 5 includes information about each of the participants in the study and is intended to provide a snapshot of information to be used as a reference when reviewing the participant narratives.

Table 5

Participant Profiles

Participant pseudonym	**Current grade level**	**Grade level when identified SPED**	**Initially eligible for special education**	**Initial eligibility /current eligibility**	**Grade level at time of placement in NPS**	**Length of time and total # of NPS placements**
Jay	9th	3rd	No	OHI/ED	6th	3 yr./1
"A"	11th	7th	No	OHI/OHI	8th	3 yr./ 1
James	9th	3rd	Yes	OHI/ED	5th	4 yr./ 1
Clouse	9th	2nd	No	OHI/OHI	2nd	7 yr./ 1
Kae	10th	3rd	No	ED/ED	4th	6 yr./ 1

Jay

Jay resided with his mom, stepdad, and his brother in the mid cities area of Los Angeles. Jay began his educational career in a traditional elementary school as a kindergarten student where he had difficulties academically. For first and second grade, Jay attended a charter school but there were no educational records indicating his academic ability. During his second grade year, while enrolled at the charter school, Jay was initially assessed for special education but was found ineligible. As a third-grade student, Jay returned to a traditional elementary school within the Los Angeles area and he was re-evaluated for special education due to continued academic and behavioral challenges. Jay was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and began to take medication to manage the symptoms. Jay was found eligible for special education under the category of Other Health Impairment (OHI) and was placed in a special day class. He remained in the same school for fourth and fifth grade. Jay began to receive outside counseling from a community agency, and he also received counseling as part of his IEP.

Jay shared several incidents that occurred while he was in elementary school as well as the final incident that led to the recommendation that he attend non-public school. Jay shared that, in one incident, his friend said something to him that made him mad, so he kicked him in the groin and pushed him down the stairs. The consequence of the incident was an out-of-school suspension. The second incident Jay described was trying to fight the teacher because she took his phone. Jay shared that the policy at the school was that students could have their phones but they could not use the phones in the classroom. He was on the phone and the teacher took his phone. Jay shared that it took four staff members to get him off of the teacher. The consequence for that behavior was a five-day out-of-school suspension. Both of the aforementioned incidents

occurred while Jay was a fourth-grade student. The final incident that Jay described that led to his being recommended for non-public school was that he was accused of stabbing a student. Jay explained,

> Well, we were both walking in the hall. And while I was walking, she was walking. We bumped into each other. And then she got an attitude, and so we were arguing. And my friends grabbed me, and we walked away. And then she went to the office and said I stabbed her. Which I did have a pencil in my hand, but I didn't stab her.

As a result of the incident, the vice principal called his parents and called the police. At this time, as a fifth-grade student, Jay was re-evaluated and his eligibility was changed from OHI to Emotional Disturbance (ED). Jay's parent un-enrolled him from the school, and the IEP team suggested that Jay attend non-public school. Jay enrolled at Victory Non-public School as a sixth-grade student. Although Jay did not know his eligibility, he stated that he had anger issues and his reading was not strong at the time he began to receive special education services. At the time of this study, Jay was in the ninth grade.

"A"

At the time of the study, "A" lived with his mother and younger brother in the Los Angeles area. "A" began his educational career as a kindergarten student in a Los Angeles elementary school. He remained in that school through the first half of second grade. He then changed to a second elementary school, where he remained through the first half of fourth grade. While in third grade, he was suspended for two days due to willful defiance. His mother requested a special education evaluation due to poor academic achievement. At the time of the evaluation, "A" was not found to be eligible for services. The suspected area of disability was Specific Learning Disability (SLD). "A" exhibited average cognitive ability and below-average academic achievement, but he did not exhibit a psychological processing deficit. As a result, he

did not meet eligibility criteria under the category of SLD. Additionally, “A” had excessive absences from school averaging about 31 missed days per school year. “A” shared that when he was in elementary school, he was often sick and, as a result, he missed many days from school. “A” stated that when he was younger, he had long hair and he would go out of the house with wet hair and that would cause him to become sick. Additionally, he said that just being a kid and not cleaning his hands would cause him to become sick. He believed that illness and absences contributed to some of his difficulties because he did not believe that he was on the same level as the other students.

It was noted in school records that “A’s” family had perpetually dealt with unstable housing throughout “A’s” educational career. “A” remained at the same elementary school for the first half of fourth grade but was homeschooled for the second half. Although he remained in the Los Angeles school district, “A” enrolled in a different elementary school as a fifth-grade student. During the fifth grade year, “A” received a one-day suspension for attempting to damage property. “A” transferred to a different elementary school for sixth grade, where he remained for the first quarter of the school year. He would transfer to two more schools during that sixth-grade year. “A” was suspended for willful defiance for one day. Academically, he continued to demonstrate difficulties meeting grade-level standards, receiving scores of below and far below proficiency. During his seventh-grade year, “A” was re-evaluated for special education, and it was determined that he met eligibility criteria for Other Health Impairment (OHI) due to attention deficit like characteristics. Although he was assessed for a specific learning disability, he was found to be ineligible in that category due to a history of poor attendance. “A” was placed

in a special day class within the school. He remained in the same school until eighth grade, when the IEP team agreed that the least restrictive environment would be the non-public school setting.

"A" described the middle school he attended prior to enrolling in Victory non-public school as a school with less staff and more kids, which resulted in less supervision and less accountability for behavior. "A" stated that he was only at the middle school for a short period of time because his mother was homeschooling him. He was homeschooled because he had been having trouble such as getting sent out of class as well as being sick, and not having enough sleep. "A" shared that he had insomnia and could not sleep at night. He explained that some of the difficulties he experienced occurred because the teacher did not understand his situation. He shared, "When the teacher would wake me up multiple times, I would be a little cranky, start talking back and being disrespectful." "A" stated that he did not know his eligibility but recalled that prior to enrolling at Victory, he was sent out of class for talking, minor fights, and rough housing. "A" could not identify one moment or incident that led to him being recommended for non-public school placement. He enrolled at Victory non-public school as an eighth-grade student and, at the time of this study, was in the eleventh grade. "A" shared that he felt he should have left Victory non-public school as soon as he got there.

James

James resided with his mom and two sisters, one older and one younger. He also shared that his mother was pregnant. James began his educational career as a kindergarten student in a Los Angeles elementary school. Academically, he was partially proficient in language arts and proficient in mathematics. He was suspended for one day while in kindergarten for threatening to cause/or causing physical injury to someone. He remained at the same school for first grade, and

he was referred to the Coordination of Services Team (COST) to address some of the academic and behavioral difficulties he was exhibiting. At that meeting, a referral was made for outside counseling services but the consent form was never returned so he did not receive those services. By the end of the year, James's scores had fallen below proficiency in language arts and mathematics. As a second-grade student, James continued at the same school and, due to a history of poor attendance and continued academic and behavioral difficulties, he was referred to the School Attendance and Review Team (SART), another COST meeting was held, and another referral was made for outside counseling. James was suspended for a total of seven days throughout that school year due to threatening to cause physical injury and willful defiance. At the end of the year, James's reading and mathematics scores were proficient but his writing scores were not proficient. As a result of the consent form for outside counseling not being returned, James began to receive counseling from the counselor on site in an effort to teach him strategies for anger management.

As a third-grade student, James remained at the same school, continued to see the school counselor and was referred for a special education assessment. James was found to be eligible under the eligibility category of other health impairment (OHI) due to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder characteristics and the team determined that the least restrictive environment was the special day class program. Throughout the school year, James was suspended a total of six times totaling 11 days of suspension for the year. Four of the suspensions were for willful defiance, one was for property damage, and one was for threatening to cause physical injury.

James shared that he spent a significant amount of time out of the classroom, which was when he would get into fights. James shared an incident in which he hit his teacher because he stated, "He tried to push me out of the classroom, so I broke in the classroom and socked him." Following that incident, while James was in the fourth grade, he was re-evaluated, and his eligibility was changed from other health impairment to emotional disturbance (ED). At that time, the IEP team felt that the least restrictive environment was non-public school. James's mother did not agree with the placement and moved him to a charter school. As a charter school student, James's eligibility was changed back to other health impairment. James remained in the charter school until December of his fifth-grade year.

James stated that during his fifth-grade year, he was kicked out of the charter school because he shot a BB gun and it bounced off the wall and hit a student and a staff member. James shared that although the incident did not occur on school grounds, he believed this incident led to his placement in the non-public school. James enrolled at Victory Non-Public School during fifth grade. At his annual IEP meeting, his eligibility was changed back to emotional disturbance. In our discussion, James did not know what his eligibility was but shared that he was not going to class, he exhibited poor behavior, and, as a result, he received an IEP. At the time of this study, James was a ninth-grade student.

Clouse

Clouse lived in the Los Angeles area with his mother and stepdad. Clouse shared that he grew up until the age of 12 believing that his biological father was his uncle. He stated that when he got into an argument with his uncle, his uncle said, "Oh well, I'm your dad, so you can't talk

to me like that." This caused Clouse to have arguments with his mother and placed a strain on their relationship to this day.

Clouse began his academic career as a kindergarten student in a Los Angeles elementary school. As a kindergarten student, Clouse was assessed for special education but was found not eligible under the categories of other health impairment and specific learning disability. After he was assessed, Clouse moved to a new school where he continued in kindergarten and continued to exhibit behavioral challenges. Academically, Clouse was proficient and making the expected amount of progress. Clouse changed schools again and began his first-grade year in a new school. A request for a re-evaluation for special education was initiated but never completed because Clouse moved to another school where he completed his first-grade year. He stated that during this time, he had seen a therapist outside of school to help him better manage his anger. He transferred to a charter school and, again, he was performing proficiently academically. At the start of the second-grade year, Clouse enrolled at a different charter school before returning to a district school. Clouse remained in that school for about one month and then transferred to another district school, where he completed second grade. While enrolled at the third school during his second-grade year, an incident occurred that resulted in a re-evaluation for special education. Clouse recounted the incident, sharing,

> I remember that day. I was in the classroom, my whole entire classroom was going out to go play dodge ball 'cause it was Friday. I was stopped. I kept on asking why, why can't I go play dodge ball, why can't I go play dodge ball? Nobody gave me a reason, and kept on ignoring me. So I had a meltdown and I started destroying the whole entire classroom. I guess that's when they called police and then my mom showed up. My dad was at work then, so he did not show up. So they called the police. I got arrested, and I guess they put me in the Principal's office. I was on the ground, yelling and screaming, and just going off, and then out of nowhere, I just stopped, and I had to throw up. And I threw up and I threw up and I threw up, so they took me to the hospital. And after they took me to the hospital, I was put in Kedren Psychiatric Hospital for a week. That's when they said that I

had been expelled from the elementary school and that I would be transferred into a new school.

Clouse shared that he felt he was assessed for special education because he fought often. He stated that he was made fun of by the other kids because he was clumsy and they called him names like “Big Head” and “Mega Mind,” which made him upset and oftentimes led to him getting into fights. The assessment indicated that Clouse was eligible for special education services under the eligibility category of other health impairment (OHI) due to a diagnosis of impulse control disorder. During the IEP meeting, the team determined that the least restrictive environment was non-public school. After he began to receive special education services, he was assigned therapeutic behavior services in the form of an adult assistant to support him due to his behavior. Clouse also received school-based counseling and full service partnership services from a community agency. Although Clouse did not know his eligibility, his belief was that he began to receive special education services because he had anger management issues. At the time of the study, Clouse was a ninth-grade student who had enrolled at Victory non-public school as a second-grade elementary school student.

Kae

Kae was residing with him mother at the time of the study. He shared that he had four older brothers, none of whom lived in the home. Kae began his educational career as a pre-kindergarten student in a Los Angeles elementary school. While a kindergarten student, it was recommended that Kae be retained but his mother did not consent. He remained in that same school through first grade. While enrolled as a first-grade student, Student Success Team (SST) meetings were held due to Kae’s poor attendance and poor academic achievement. Kae moved to a smaller district outside of Los Angeles when he was in the second grade and was assessed for

special education. He was found ineligible for services as a student with a specific learning disability due to his history of excessive absences. By the end of his first semester of third grade, Kae was re-evaluated, and it was determined that he was eligible for special education under the category of emotional disturbance (ED) due to violent outbursts. Kae shared that when he began to hang out with one of his friends, he began to exhibit anger issues. Kae remembered not doing his work in class, instead he would pretend to do work and laugh and play around in class. He shared being angry with his classroom teacher because there was a student who would bully him, throwing things at him every day and he felt that the teacher did not understand. Kae shared that he got into a fight with the student who threw almonds at him and it took several adults to pull him off of the student.

> I said I was gonna kill myself and stuff, at that school. Because I got so mad at the teachers, and then that's when they sent me to the mental hospital. It was like . . . .you can't go back home. When my mom came, she was like, "you can't go back home." And I'm like, "why?" And I started getting mad, like, started like, going wild. Like, that's when they said they was gonna put some stuff in me, like, with a needle, and I was like, oh no, I gotta calm down. And that's when they put me in a little chair and took me to the hospital.

Following the incident, Kae was hospitalized for suicidal ideation and diagnosed with depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Kae believed that was the incident that led to the recommendation for non-public school placement. Upon being released from the hospital, Kae was homeschooled until a non-public school placement was identified. He then enrolled at Victory non-public school as a fourth-grade student. At the time of this study, he was in tenth grade.

Commonalities Among Participants

Based on the initial interviews with the participants and review of documents, four commonalities were noted. The first commonality was that none of the participants was aware of their actual special education eligibility. The students all shared that they believed they were receiving special education services as a result of difficulties with anger management. The second commonality was that Victory non-public school was the first and only non-public school placement for each of the participants. The third commonality was that of the five participants, four of the young men were placed in non-public school while they were in elementary school and the fifth student was placed while in middle school. All of the participants were now in high school. The fourth commonality was that four of the five participants were initially assessed and found to be ineligible for special education services and then, upon re-evaluation (within a year or two), they were all found to be eligible. The commonalities are of interest because there were a small number of participants. The next section will begin to address the research questions and the themes that emerged from the data.

Definitions of Care

The first research question addressed in this study was how do African American male secondary students with special needs define care? Two themes emerged based on the information that was provided by the study participants, the redirection and encouragement provided by the teacher with regard to academics and behavior, and the teacher's willingness to provide help in the form of academic assistance to the participants. I will describe each of the themes in further detail in this section.

Theme 1: Encouragement and Redirection

Each of the participants defined what it meant for their teacher to care. All five of the participants shared that they felt the teacher cared when they provided redirection and encouragement. Part of the redirection included the teacher's ability to facilitate the student's attendance in class. Jay stated, "Ms. Liz tries to keep me in class and so do my other teachers. I think all the teachers try to keep me in class."

The participants in the study equated teacher caring to the teacher talking to them to encourage them to go to class. "A" stated that his teachers would tell him to close the door and sit down to complete his work. He also felt that if the teacher did not tell him to attend class, or make an effort to keep him in class, that meant the teacher did not care. James shared that his teacher explicitly stated, "I'm telling you to go to class because I care about you." James, like "A," felt that the teacher would not spend time talking to him or encouraging him to go to class if he did not care. Clouse shared, "Even though I ditch class all the time, Ms. Liz still looks for me, she's still willing to let me back in the class to try, to give me another chance to try and do my work."

Finally, Kae shared that over the years he had been at Victory School, he knew the teachers cared for him, sharing, "Like every time I ran out of the class, they'd go after me." The participants also defined care in terms of the redirection and encouragement they received from their teachers to persevere with tasks completion. Jay stated,

> When teachers try to get us to do our work and to get us to show effort, that's probably them telling us that they care. Mr. Kenny gets me to try to like learn stuff in music and even though I really don't like it, I'm still trying to learn the song because he tries to motivate me.

The redirection and encouragement for some participants made a difference in whether or not they cared in class. Clouse shared,

> For my teacher to care, she has to go that extra mile. She has to put in that extra work that is needed to deal with me. I know me. I do the most, I'm extra loud and I'm clumsy, so you have to have a lot of patience with dealing with me. If a teacher truly, truly cares she will still help me. She will work with me, help for me to get better.

Clouse spoke of teachers going that extra mile by looking for him when he ditched without judging him but continuing to allow him in the class and working with him despite the challenges that he presented. James stated that his teacher would tell him directly that he was talking to him because he cared about him and his ability to pass his classes or to leave the school one day. "A" shared that his teachers would redirect and encourage him even if he was having a bad day. He mentioned that they did not ignore him but they gave him space. "A" said,

> They try to encourage me when I don't want to do work. I'm like hey, I'm having a bad day and the teachers would say it's cool, just try and do this, if you need a break it's okay, stuff like that.

Kae felt as though the encouragement and redirection had to do with the teacher's communication skills. Kae shared,

> Teacher caring means, body language, it's communication skills. It's how they look eye to eye, make eye-to-eye contact and have effective communication. That is when they really like not interrupting you, not throwing you off, not cutting you off. They're listening 100 percent.

Each of the participants felt that the encouragement and redirection provided by their teachers was an indicator of care. The second theme to emerge regarding the definition of care was the teacher's willingness to provide help academically.

Theme 2: Willingness to Provide Help

Three of the participants described care in terms of providing help academically. Caring was referred to by the participants as the teacher's desire to see them be successful and to participate in the learning process. Jay spoke of the willingness of his music teacher to provide help. Jay stated, "Like he'll like tell me, to tell him a song, any song and he'll say, "I'll try to help you, like I'll teach it to you or something." Jay felt that if the teacher was willing to help him, he was willing to try. Another participant, "A," said that if a teacher cares, the teacher cares about the well-being of others and they want to see students succeed. Specifically, "A" stated if the teacher cared, "The teacher might be working with a student that would be a sign, or taking the extra time off of doing whatever they are doing to help you understand how to do a problem or something like that." "A" was speaking of the teacher helping him with an academic problem. "A" felt that when the teacher provided assistance one on one, the teacher was taking extra time and that was an indication that the teacher cared. James defined care as the teacher providing help when asked. Kae did not speak of care by the teacher as providing help academically but stated, "If a teacher cares, they show respect, they are fair, help me, they are fair to others when I'm around and they are respectful to each other. They help me out with a lot of things." Kae stated that the teachers helped him to behave in and out of the classroom and the teacher was willing to help. In speaking about one teacher in particular, Kae shared,

> So every time he gave me work, he at least like tried to take some of the stuff out that he knew I couldn't do and he just gave me the work that I could do and when he gave it to me, he just, he'd give me like a break to go play outside or give me stuff to be on like laptops, my phone, a computer, whatever.

Kae felt that when the teacher provided him with work that he was able to complete, the teacher was scaffolding his learning in an effort to keep him from being frustrated. As his academic skills improved, the teacher would give him more work.

The definitions of care provided by the participants centered on two themes, the teacher's ability to encourage and redirect and the willingness of the teacher to provide help academically. The next section will address the second research question and the themes that emerged.

Care and Educational Experiences

The second research question addressed in the study was, to what extent do African American male secondary students with special needs perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experiences? Two themes emerged from the data, including provision of support by teachers and opportunities to increase support by teachers. The theme of provision of support by teachers described behaviors that were demonstrated by the teachers/staff to motivate and redirect students, behaviors that exhibited sincerity and honesty on the part of the teacher/staff, or behaviors that were intended to hold students accountable. Theme two described behaviors that were not perceived as supportive by the students including behaviors that were perceived as punitive in nature, or behaviors that included shaming on the part of the teacher.

Theme 3: Provision of Support by Teachers

Each participant believed that it was important for the teacher to care. They each believed that if the teacher did not care, their educational experiences would be negatively impacted. The students spoke of how the teacher's ability to motivate them to participate in class supported them educationally. Jay stated,

> It's like I know that the teachers and teachers' aides that work at Victory are very motivated. They like try to motivate us to go to class and do our work, because they want

> to see us go out of this – like for this school in particular, honestly, if it wasn't for the staff at this school, I'd probably be failing.

Jay believed that the teachers' ability to show that they care impacted whether or not he put forth effort in his classes. "A" felt that in order for students to learn, the teachers must care. He stated that one of the ways that his teacher supported him was by standing up and speaking to the students. "A" stated,

> I think Mr. Carlos typically, he stands. He'll look you directly in the eye. He looks all of us directly in the eye when speaking. For example, any time you do anything, he always stands up, look you in the eye, make sure you understand.

When probed further, "A" stated that the teacher required the students to respond to him by saying,

> Shake your head yes to make sure you're not just staring him down with a blank face. The teachers are making sure they have your attention, that's a real big part. I'll be in class sometimes just staring. The teacher snaps his fingers, and I'm back at it.

By snapping his finger, the teacher was signaling or redirecting the student back to task. Jay also spoke of the support provided by the teacher by way of redirection, sharing, "It's like, if you care about something and you see they're doing something wrong, you're going to correct them, right? So you're always getting corrected and redirected." James shared that his teachers support him by redirecting him when he does something wrong in class stating that the teacher would tell him what he was doing wrong and hold him accountable for the behavior. The participants believed that when the teachers held them accountable, they were exhibiting supportive behavior, which they equated with teacher care. James shared that if he was in the classroom and became distracted, the teacher might "Tell me to do my work. Get it done. Tell me to take breaks if – I have to or the teacher will take my phone and give it back at the end of class."

Although the students shared that they may get upset initially when the teacher tried to hold them accountable, they understood that the teachers did so because they cared. Several of the participants mentioned that they felt most of their teachers were genuine and honest, which they also equated with teacher support and care. “A” stated,

> They really pay attention to me and what I need as an individual. They ask me if I'm okay, if there's anything wrong. Asking me if I need help. Sometimes I don't know how to speak up in the classroom.

Clouse shared similarly stating that he felt most of his teachers understood that the students were different, stating,

> So you have to slow down for some of the kids, and some of the kids that move quicker, you just let them go on ahead. For example, one of my teachers says, “Clouse, slow down a little bit, because when you rush through the work you miss things.”

The participants shared their educational experiences with their teachers. The theme of the provision of support by teachers highlighted the students’ perceptions of how teacher care affected their educational experiences. The fourth theme, opportunities for increased support by teachers, addressed the student’s perceptions about how their teacher’s ability to care affected their educational experiences.

Theme 4: Opportunities for Increased Support by Teachers

The participants shared their perceptions of what would happen if the teachers did not care. They also shared behaviors exhibited by some of their teachers that indicated a lack of support and negatively affected their educational experience. “A” shared, “If the teachers don’t care, people aren’t going to learn.” Clouse said that if the teachers did not care,

> All hell breaks loose. I would probably end up quitting. If they didn’t care, they would just sit there all day everyday, ‘cause you have to care to deal with this. You can’t just leave the kids and be like, “oh, read this” and then leave to go do something else. You

> have to watch them. You have to listen and sit there and do it with them, work with them, ‘cause not all kids work the same way and at the same pace.

The study participants expressed that some of the comments that the teachers made did not support them but rather provided them with reasons to ditch class. For example, Jay stated that one of his teachers tells the class, “Stop talking and get back to work, because you're passing, and you don't want to not pass, because you don't want to take me again.” The participants shared that comments like that upset them because they felt that the teacher was not being understanding. James shared that some of the teachers did not treat the students individually but treated them as a unit. James stated,

> We get kicked out for other people's opinions in Ms. Liz’s class, and when we in Ms. Drummond’s class. And when you knock on the door, they don't want to answer sometimes 'cause we late, but I'm trying to do my work, she think I'm talking, but I don't. If somebody do something, everybody gonna get in trouble for it. And that's not fair. And I tell her, "I didn't do nothing. Why you kicking me out?" "Because you all had a part to it." I'm like, "What did I do? I didn't tell her to do that." And then, she kicks us out for the whole day. I try to get my work done, but she don't like me. They don't let me in class 'cause we always getting kicked out. She kicks me out for no reason and she kicking people out for no reason. And when I want to talk to her, she don't try to like me. Like, I was taking a break in the back because I was mad and she kicked me out for that 'cause I said I wanted to take a break.

The participants viewed the behavior of some of their teachers as punitive, which was interpreted as a lack of support. Clouse shared that he did not like one of his teachers and therefore did not like the class she taught. He recounted an experience in which he wanted to take a break from class, and he felt the teacher’s attitude was not supportive. He stated that he asked the teacher,

> “Can I take a break?” even though I've been sitting in class the whole time without asking for any breaks. I was just sitting there doing my work. Again, I said in a good way, I asked her to take one break. One break. She was like, "Oh, all you ever want to do is take breaks. You've been taking breaks all class." So I just had to walk out. So I walked out and now I can't go back in like I was originally planning to either.

Clouse felt that he could tell from a teacher's posture whether or not they cared stating,

> A teacher who doesn't care, their posture—they're probably not going to pay attention to the kid. They're just going to ignore him or her, depending on the student. 'Cause some teachers, they only pick out the best of the best, the quickest students, and then the kids that can't keep up just get left behind.

Clouse went on to state that the majority of his classes were fine with regard to teacher support but one of his classes did not support him educationally:

> It's just a bad class in general. I don't like that class. It makes me mad when I'm in that class. I get really, really angry. And then for the fact for me to try to take a break to cool down so I won't go off on you and you still trip. That's extra. If my teacher had a different attitude I might like that class a lot. But she just has a real big "I don't care" attitude and it just makes me mad.

The participants also alluded to the fact that sometimes the support that they receive depended on how the teacher perceives them. Kae shared,

> It all depends about what the teacher thinks about you sometimes in ways because – like if you are a disrespectful kid, the teacher won't really ask you your opinion. The teacher's not going to really focus on you like that unless he really wants to help you.

The students' perceptions of teacher care had either a positive affect or a negative effect on the educational experiences of the students. The next section will discuss how the ethic of care was demonstrated in the classroom based on the perception of the participants.

The Ethic of Care in the Classroom

The third research question addressed in the study was, based on African American male secondary students with special needs perceptions of care, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher? The four components of care as described by Noddings (1984) are modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. Modeling is one of the components expected when implementing caring in education. When a teacher demonstrates modeling, it is the action of showing students how to care, which is based on the relationships

with the students (Noddings, 1984). The second component required for care in education is the use of dialogue. Both parties enter into dialogue without having an answer in mind but are open to the interaction (Noddings, 1984). Practice is the third component to implementing caring in schools. Practice involves opportunities for students to be taught and to learn specific skills that support the development of attitudes that demonstrate caring for others (Noddings, 1984). The fourth component necessary for care in schools is confirmation. Confirmation is an opportunity for teachers to engage with students regarding choices that are made without judging the student by the situation but by sharing with the students another view of themselves (Noddings, 1984).

Although the interview questions addressed the components of care, the participants commonly shared how their teachers spoke to them and how the disposition of the teacher impacted their perceptions. The two themes that emerged from this research question were teachers talking to students and the teacher's disposition. Each theme will be discussed in further detail below as it relates to the participant's perceptions.

Theme 5: Teachers Speaking to Students

The participants shared about their interactions with their teachers both in and outside of the classroom. Each participant's perspective was different based on his relationship with the various teachers. The concept of the teacher spending time talking to students was a demonstration of the ethic of care. The consistent thread throughout each interview was that the teachers took the time to speak to the students regarding their academics, behavior, and incidents that may have taken place outside of school. The participants felt that there was a level of understanding on the part of the teacher, which was important as it relates to the ethic of care. Jay shared that he appreciated when his teachers talked to him to keep him focused on his

academics by talking to him about his behavior because he knew that they wanted him to eventually leave the school. Jay shared,

> Ms. Drummond told me to get up and move away from my friends because she felt like I was going to fail. She said, "You could pass with this D, but you're going to have to move because you were doing good."

James shared a similar sentiment in that when his teacher learned of an inappropriate behavior, he contacted his uncle. Although he did not like the teacher's approach initially, after talking to his teacher, he felt better and understood that it was necessary to support him. James shared:

> Okay, so we was smoking marijuana and then my teacher called my uncle or whatever and sat me down and had a talk with me about what happened and not to do it or whatever. Then I got in trouble because he called my uncle, and my uncle, he don't play or whatever. If he's getting a call from work talking to him about his nephew smoking at school, he's going to be mad but teachers have to do what's right for the kid to stay in class. If they're not listening, call they're parents.

The students recognized that their teachers were available to support them, and they shared that sometimes they would ask for the advice of their teachers, but other times, the teachers intervened in situations because they had heard students discussing an incident. Jay shared,

> I remember one time my friends were making fun of a student and of course, I laughed and then I agreed, and I guess we was all making fun of her. Ms. Stacy, she was like, "It's not really nice to make fun of people because of their living conditions." She was like, "You don't know what could be going on in her home in order for you guys to make fun of the way she smells." I guess that kind of made me feel like I should be nicer to her because I really shouldn't make fun of people that I don't know anything about.

Jay stated that when the teacher intervened, it made him rethink how his behavior might impact someone else. He stated that the interaction with his teacher caused him to interact with students differently. Clouse recounted an experience where his teacher's decision to talk to him and intervene prevented him from making a bad incident worse. Clouse shared,

> See, I got into a fight, a big fight. I was not trying to let this person go. I was going and hitting—hitting him in his face constantly. Constantly. And all the teacher did was walk

> up to me, like, "Just let him go. There's no point in making this situation worse. All he's gonna do is get you in trouble." So I just let him go. Sooner or later we made up, and I thank my teacher for that. 'Cause if my teacher had not done that, I would've kept on going and kept on going till I broke his nose. Luckily I didn't.

Likewise, "A" shared that his teachers talked to him either before or after a negative interaction. He shared that the teacher's interaction influenced how he approached similar situations that arose. "A" stated,

> I got into a fight with somebody that I shouldn't have fought. 'Cause I had been told, like, you know, this person just wants to get under your skin and stuff like that. The teacher talked to me one-on-one and like, "Oh what happened?" and they would try to make sure that I don't do it next time, if there is a next time, and try to prevent, you know, and have it happen again.

The interaction with the teacher provided an opportunity for the teacher to discuss the situation with the student without focusing on the behavior but rather showing the student another way to deal with the situation. Kae had a similar experience with his teachers when he did not go to class. Kae said,

> They [teachers] pull you to the side, some teachers that care, they pull you to the side and they tell you that they will try to help you do better than what you're doing. At anything you're doing, they'll help you try to be better.

Kae felt that the teachers encouraged him and spoke with him even though he did not believe that it was part of their job. He believed that if teachers took the time to speak to the students about any situation, it was going above and beyond because he believed that they teachers did not have to care. Clouse spoke about how one of his teachers in particular spoke to the students in his class when there was an incident that could have caused the students to be at odds with one another. Clouse stated,

> There was a time they [students] were making giggling noises and talking crap about me. And instead of going off, I sat there, waited for a second, sooner or later the teacher stood up for me. She was like, "Why would you talk about him if you wouldn't like him to talk

> about you? You complain every day that he messes with you and yells at you, but instead you're in the back talking about him." And I admit I thanked her because it was better than me going off.

Clouse felt that because his teacher spoke with his classmates, she showed that she cared about not only him but also his classmates. This was an opportunity for her to help the students gain a better understanding regarding a situation. Clouse further stated,

> I'm more understanding because of them. The teachers are very understanding. I'm not. Or I used to not be. I used to not care about anything or anyone. It was me, me, me. But seeing my teachers, the way they act, it's taught me that caring is better than just not caring, because if I care about you and I help you out, in my time of need I'm going to be able to come back to the people, these people, and ask them for help.

"A" felt similarly in that if he were having a bad day, his teacher would acknowledge that and try to support him. "A" provided the following example:

> If I skip class, they would like, you know, talk to me, tell me to come back in, you know, "Oh, you come in and if you go to the back and you can put your head down for a few minutes and finish your work later." And as long as you write something, "It's cool. Okay, I understand."

Both "A" and Clouse saw the demonstration of caring for others by how their teachers interacted with them. Clouse felt that through the teacher's ability to model, he should be caring also, although his understanding was somewhat based on a conditional view of caring. James shared a view of caring that was conditional also with regard to whether or not the people to be cared for were his friends. James stated that the act of his teachers speaking to him might impact how he treated or cared for other people if the other people were his friends. There was a condition placed on extending care to others. In the conversation below, James rationalized the way he would respond depending on who the person was.

> *Interviewer:* Is there anything that your teachers do or say that may impact how you treat other people or how you care for other people?

> *James:* It depends on who we talking about. Like if it's my friends, yeah, but if it's somebody I don't talk to, then no.
> *Interviewer:* So your teacher may tell you "Don't give somebody a hard time," but if that person isn't your friend, then you aren't necessarily going to listen to what the teacher says?
> *James:* No, I am but it's just if they mess with me, then I mess with them back.

James and Clouse shared that when the teacher speaks or interacts with the students, it may have an impact on the student with respect to caring for others. If the student viewed the teacher's caring as conditional that may also influence their interactions with others. The teacher's disposition is the second theme that emerged based on the research question.

Theme 6: Teachers' Disposition

The responses provided by the study participants led to the understanding that the disposition of the teacher was further demonstrative of the ethic of care in the classroom. During the interviews, the participants shared that the teacher's tone of voice as well as the teacher's ability to show common courtesy such as asking them how they were doing or being nice and/or kind to them influenced how they interacted with others, namely other students. Additional evidence of the teacher's influence came in the form of the teacher asking for the student's opinion or feeling on a specific subject. The teachers had the opportunity to demonstrate the ethic of care, however, one of the participants spoke of the teacher's tendency to place a condition around whether or not they would engage with students. Kae shared,

> If you're like average (not disrespectful) and you listen, He's [teacher] going to want to call you out all the time. He's going to want to ask you stuff. He's going to tell you to do this, do that.

Most of the participants spoke of the teacher's disposition in some way. Jay spoke about the teacher being nice or kind, stating,

> I guess when I'm around Mr. Jonathan, and Ms. Maribel, and Mr. Pete, they make me feel kind of like I should be nicer to people. They're nice and kind to me. It's just like when you care about someone, you get a warm feeling. It makes you want to care about other people.

Clouse stated that when his teachers spoke to him in the morning or asked him how he was doing, it caused him to want to exhibit those same behaviors toward others. Clouse shared,

> They [teachers] do simple stuff like they ask me how I'm doing, when I walk in they say "Good morning,"— leave, "Bye, Clouse, I'll see you tomorrow." Simple stuff. When I'm—when I'm mad or something they'll ask, "Oh, what's wrong? Is there anything—can I help you?" Simple stuff. If she's treating me well, asking me how am I doing, telling me good morning and stuff, I like it. I like when people ask me how I'm doing and stuff. So, you know, so I think to myself, "Oh, I should start nodding to people." So now I go around asking if people are all right.

The teacher's disposition influenced whether students were engaged in class lessons as well as how students interacted with the teacher. "A" shared how the teacher presented information in class stating,

> The way they explain it. You know, they usually explain it with detail. More detail than needed, 'cause I have a hard time understanding a lot of things sometimes, so yeah, that, and the tone of their voice. They'll talk soft sometimes, 'cause they know like if I'm frustrated, they'll say, "Oh, you know, it's okay. It's okay. You'll get it." Stuff like that.

"A" acknowledged that not all of his teachers exhibited that same soft tone but he felt that the attitude of the teacher was important. If the teacher's attitude was positive, students may be more engaged in the class lesson. "A" stated that while he was in class, the teachers solicited the opinions of the students. "A" stated that the teacher might say, "Hey "A," or whoever, give me an example of this and that or the teacher might say, what is your take on this, how do you feel about this"? To "A," it was important for the teacher to ask his opinion because if the teacher did not exhibit a positive attitude, he felt that the teacher would not try to engage the students but would simply try to get through the class material. Although it was important to "A" for the

teacher to display a positive attitude, he did not feel that the teacher's disposition influenced him in caring for others. He simply stated, "I won't lie, I'm glad that they care for me, but it doesn't really affect me and how I treat others." The study participants provided examples of how the teacher demonstrated the components of the ethic of care through the two themes that emerged, teachers speaking to students and the teacher's disposition. The next section will address research question 4.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The fourth research question addressed in the study was, how are the suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher according to the perceptions of African American male secondary students with special needs? In an effort to address this question, the interview questions focused on the three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy, conceptions of self and others, the manner in which social relations are constructed, and conceptions of knowledge.

The first supposition of conceptions of self and others refers to several concepts, including the idea that teachers believe that all students are capable of academic success, the teacher's practice is unpredictable and always in process, teachers see themselves as members of the community, they see teaching as a way to give back to the community, and they pull knowledge out (Ladson-Billings, 1995). As a result, teachers do not allow students to choose failure and the teacher's language focuses on high expectations, not deficit thinking.

Teachers who implement culturally relevant methods engage their students in social interactions to support academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness by maintaining fluid student-teacher relationships, demonstrating connectedness with all of the

students, developing a community of learners, and encouraging students to learn collaboratively an, be responsible for one another (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The second supposition of culturally relevant pedagogy is the manner in which social relations are constructed.

The third supposition of culturally relevant pedagogy is conceptions of knowledge. If a teacher engages in culturally relevant practices, specific elements should be demonstrated, such as a belief that knowledge is shared, recycled, and constructed with students as well as a belief that the students are viewing knowledge with a critical lens. Additionally, teachers are passionate about knowledge and learning, they scaffold to facilitate learning, and they provide multiple opportunities for assessment of content (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Based on the data, three themes emerged, including, teachers' expectations, building relationships, and relating content to life. This section will address each of the themes from the perspectives of the participants.

Theme 7: Teachers' Expectations

During the interviews with the participants, they shared experiences regarding the expectations of their teachers. The experiences may have demonstrated the high expectations that their teachers held for them by allowing extra time but still requiring them to complete an assignment or scaffolding an assignment in order for them to access the material. The experiences may have also reflected a lack of rigor in assignments, which may indicate that the teacher did not hold the students to high expectations. "A" shared that when he did not want to complete the work, the teacher would tell him to take a break but the teacher continued to hold him to the same expectation as everyone else in terms of completing the work. Clouse shared,

> Even though I always argue with a certain student, flip tables, jump on desks, do all that, she's still willing to let me back in the class to try, and to give me another chance to try and do my work.

Clouse also provided an example of how the teacher required the students to think about their learning, and would not accept answers only but required that they explain themselves. Clouse shared,

> You can't just write an answer at the bottom. She wants you to write out the whole problem so you can explain it better and you can get to understand it better. In life you have to just lay out the whole problem to understand it and not just come up with a quick answer for it, 'cause you're not always going to be right.

Jay shared that, at times, he had felt that his teachers were annoying because they constantly redirected him back to task because they wanted him to complete his assignments. He stated, "He [teacher] wants us to pass. He told me that he cares. He doesn't want to see me fail." Each participant felt that the majority of their teachers understood the challenges that they had had and were willing to provide them with additional time to complete assignments. Clouse shared that his teachers scaffolded the work in class in an effort for students to access the information. He shared, "The content that the teachers show, they try to keep it as young as possible but still to our age group, because kids aren't, -- there's barely any mature kids here."

Clouse felt that the teachers were able to scaffold the material in such a way that it was made understandable to all students in the class. While each of the participants felt that he had made some academic growth at Victory School, he did not articulate that all of his teachers held him to high expectations. In fact, many of the examples were indicative of a lack of rigor in class assignments and, as a result, low expectations. In terms of rigor, the participants spoke of whether or not they completed the assigned work as well as the type of work they completed in their classes and whether or not the work was difficult or easy, or if it was challenging. Jay spoke

of work completion in terms of academic growth. Jay shared that, at his previous school, he had completed his work but since he had been enrolled at Victory School, he had not wanted to complete his work. Jay stated,

> Victory, I got too used to Victory and I kind of slowed down academically so I don't like doing work, because the work got easy, like, so I didn't like it. I did it but I didn't put effort into it, because I knew I would get it right.

Jay did not feel as though the work was challenging to him. Clouse shared similarly, saying,

> High school is actually way easier than I thought it was. I thought it was like big thick packets of work. It's a heck of a lot easier. It's not hard at all, actually. Even if it was always a packet, it would still be easy, just quite annoying to complete 'cause it's time-consuming.

Clouse further shared that he has had to tell his teachers, "This is getting too easy. I'm going to need you to bump up my work a little bit." Academic rigor in terms of students being challenged academically, personally, and intellectually seemed to be lacking based on the participants' educational experiences. Not all participants felt that the work was too easy. "A" recounted his experience, sharing that he felt he had grown academically since enrolling at Victory school; however, he also felt that he had not been motivated to continue to do well. He stated,

> I think I've grown a lot from where I was when I first got here but me personally, I've slowed down. You can only take so much. I did, I started off like fantastic, and then I thought I should have moved on. I didn't, so I kind of lost a little bit of motivation. So in the 9th, my first year of high school, I wanted to do good just because it was my first year and then tenth is all downhill, just bad, both semesters. Eleventh is my current grade. I'm not doing terribly great but it's not [like it was] middle school.

"A" shared that he believed that when he was doing well, he should have returned to his school of residence, and when that did not happen, he lost motivation. "A" still had hopes of returning to his school of residence when he was able to raise his grades in order to graduate with his class. The goal of the non-public school is to return students to their schools of residence. One of the

ways in which schools support the return of students to their school of residence is through the relationships that teachers build with the students. The next section will address the theme of building relationships.

Theme 8: Building Relationships

Participants shared stories of their interactions with their teachers as they related to the theme of building relationships. Kae spoke of the relationship that he had with one of his teachers and how he saw him as a big brother. As a result of the relationship he had developed with the teacher, he wanted to put forth effort in class. Kae shared,

> I looked at Mr. Thomas as like a big brother, not even a teacher. I didn't care about the teacher part, just a big brother because he was young and I was always in his class. I was in his class for most of my elementary years. We had meetings about what we should do and what we should not do. We went on field trips and he was just one of the teachers that just liked to take the kids everywhere just to show them like this is better than what you're doing. You can do more things.

Jay shared that he did not have a favorite subject in school, but he tolerated his health class because of the relationship that he had with the teacher. He stated that his teacher reminded him of his mother. Jay shared,

> Ms. Drummond, she does this reverse psychology by saying she doesn't care, but she really does, so it kind of be like, I'm going to do it [work] just because you told me not to do it. I realized that as soon as I met Ms. Drummond, so I was like, I know her game, but I still do the work.

During the interview, the participants were asked if they felt that it was important for their teachers to know them outside of school. The participants felt that if a teacher wanted to truly support and help them, the teacher should know something about them outside of school. Kae shared,

> If that teacher is really going to sit there and talk to me and try to like deal with me, then yeah, they should know something, but if not, then what's the point. I would feel that someone cared if they took the time to get to know me.

Likewise, “A” shared, “Teachers should spend time talking to the students and taking the time to really learn about the student and, you know, help them.” Building relationships with students was important to all participants. However there was a difference between the relationships that were built with teaching staff versus those with the clinical staff. Jay shared,

> I like how staff are, because staff are 100, complete, they are 100 percent all of the time. For example, if I said, I’m going to rob somebody and say I tell Ms. Maribel, she’ll probably be like, don’t do that. Even though she’ll tell me, like I support you (like be there for you), she will be like you probably shouldn’t do that, for your best interest unless you want to get arrested. But counselors, they're not realistic people. It's like when you talk to somebody, you want them to be straight up with you, and not all therapists are like that. They're like, well, I support you, and all this and this. I be like, can you give it to me straight?

Jay felt that the clinical staff would be supportive but the relationship would lack authenticity because a clinician’s job includes listening to the students and providing non-judgmental responses, which is different from the teaching staff. In other words, the clinical staff might not be genuine.

James and Clouse shared about how they enjoyed their woodshop class and also addressed the importance of building relationships. They both enjoyed woodshop because they were able to be creative and build things; but beyond that, Clouse spoke of woodshop being the only class where he was able to successfully work within a group. Both participants shared that the classroom teacher required them to work in groups. Clouse shared, “I’ve learned team-building skills. I learned how to create more stuff, how to get more creative. I put more thought into my stuff.” The classroom teacher created a collaborative learning environment for the students. James felt that if his other classes created opportunities for him to build things, he would be more engaged in the classes rather than solely reading. The final theme that emerged from the fourth research question was relating content to life.

Theme 9: Relating Content to Life

The final theme that emerged from the fourth research question was the teacher's ability to relate content to life. The participants provided examples of how their teachers utilized their lived experiences and lives outside of school to connect both academic and behavioral content to real life. Jay shared that his teachers did not always share their lives outside of school with the students but when they were trying to support the students, they would share their experiences. Jay stated, "Sometimes, if I'm going through something, I think they'll try to relate to me from something that happened to them. That's the only time I really get to know something about them."

The participants all agreed that they did not ask their teachers about their lives outside of school but there had been situations where the teachers had used personal information to better relate to the students. For example James stated, "Well I don't really get personal because that's their personal business. Sometimes they be like, 'I got kids, so I'm talking to you like a parent.' I'll be like how many kids but that's it." In an effort to make classes more engaging, teachers tried to connect the learning to everyday life. Participants spoke about the teachers making the material relatable to their lives. For example, Jay shared,

> I think they care about our education. I feel like Ms. Drummond finds ties and stuff and she actually follows the things that she tells us to do, like, "Don't smoke. Eat healthy." She does those things. Her and the people that work in the health class for my period, they do that. They talk about it. They constantly talk about it. I actually know she cares about the work.

"A" also spoke about his science teacher making the material relevant to his life. He shared that his teacher enjoyed teaching science. He stated that science was his favorite class even though he

did not like the subject. “A” felt that the teacher makes the class cool. When asked what the teacher did to make class cool, “A” said,

> Her teaching. It’s just the way she does it, like how she’ll teach it. She’ll relate it to life, you know. ‘Cause some of the stuff that we learn in biology, I know it relates to life, of course, but I don’t know how to relate it to my life and it’s just like she made an example of how to relate it to everyday things in my life and I’ll be like, okay, now I’m more interested in learning, so I do my work.

Kae shared about a project that he completed in his health class that helped him better retain the information. He was required to complete the chart with information about him. As a result, the assignment connected to his everyday life. Kae stated,

> There’s a health chart where you make not things that’s in the book, but your own opinion about what would you do and how would you do it and why would you do it. You have to make a health triangle about yourself. One section would have emotional, mental health, and then the other would have like some other health questions, and then you have to draw a picture. It describes you. It has to describe you, so you have to make something that describes you in a healthy way.

Kae felt that he was invested and engaged in his health class as a result of completing the project. Other participants felt that if they were given the opportunity to complete projects in their content classes, they might be more engaged in class. “A” shared, that in most of his classes, they were only given the option of completing paper and pencil tests. He felt that if his teachers provided the opportunity to show mastery in an alternative way, he would be more successful. “A” stated,

> I think a project would be better because I’m not the best at writing, so it would help me. But I think you can do more with a project. With the words it’s like, you know, you can’t express yourself unless you’re a very good writer, which we’re not. I know a lot of kids at this school aren’t.

Jay, James, and Clouse also felt that if they were given the opportunity to show mastery of the content by completing presentations or projects, they would be more engaged in their classes.

The teacher's ability to relate content to the lives of the students was important to the participants. The suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy were demonstrated through the themes of teachers' expectations, building relationships and relating content to life.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to listen to the voices of African American male students with disabilities in non-public school educational settings to better understand how the care of a teacher had supported them in their educational experience. The interviews that were conducted with each of the participants addressed the four research questions. The perceptions of the participants were gathered in an effort to provide demonstrative evidence that would answer the research questions. Figure 2 illustrates how the nine themes that emerged from the data align with the components of the theoretical framework.

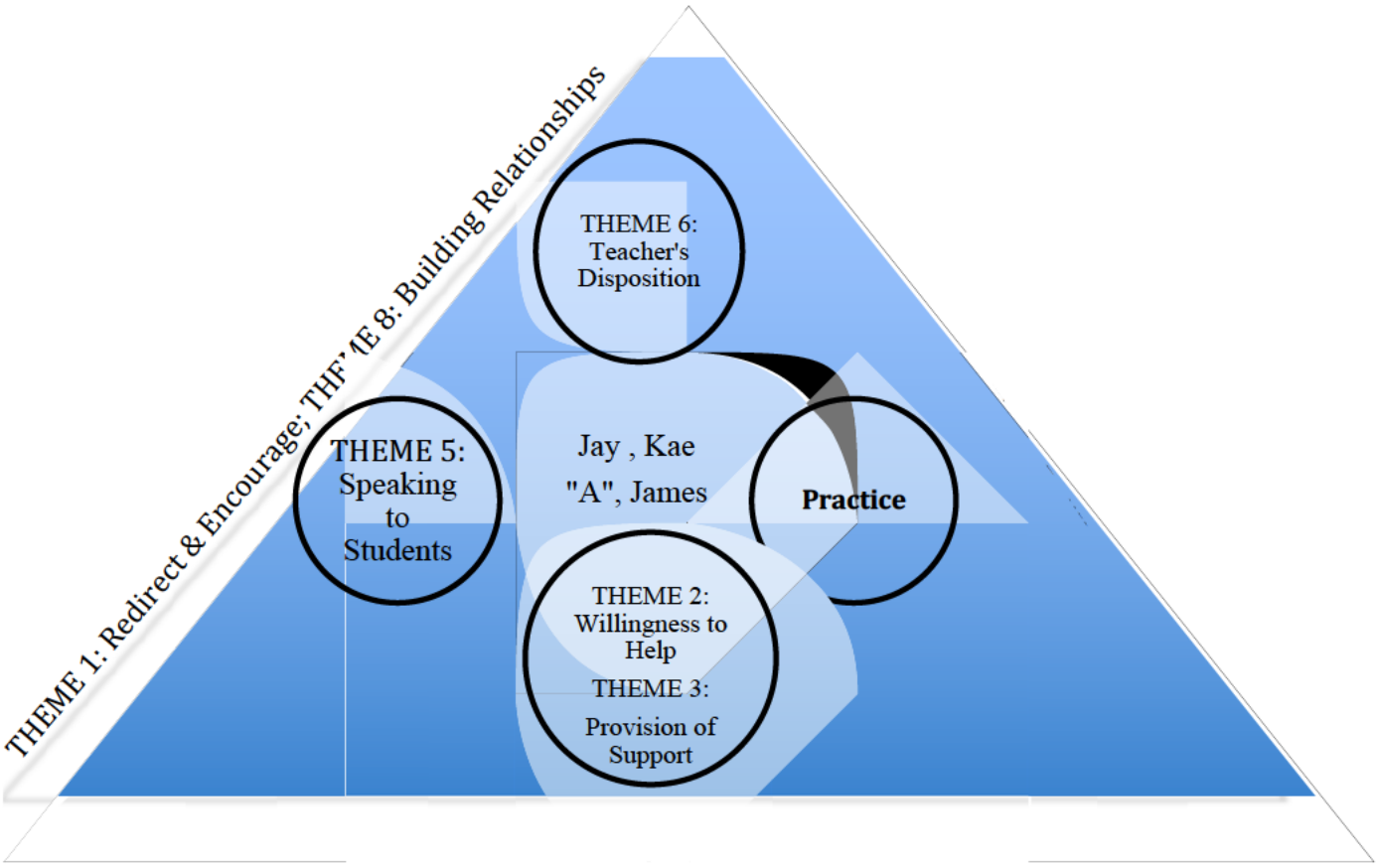


Figure 2. Integration of the themes and the theoretical framework.

The first research question was to determine how the participants defined care. The participants described care in terms of the two themes, Theme 1: the teacher's ability to provide redirection and encouragement; and Theme 2: the teacher's willingness to help. The second research question addressed the extent to which teacher care affected the participants' educational experiences. The perceptions of the participants indicated that the care of the teacher impacted their educational experiences both positively and negatively and were demonstrated through the following two themes: Theme 3: the provision of support by teachers; and Theme 4: the opportunities for increased support by teachers. The third research question addressed how

the teacher demonstrated the four components of the ethic of care in the classroom. The participants described the components of the ethic of care through the following two themes: Theme 5: teachers speaking to students; and Theme 6: teachers' disposition. Finally, the fourth research question addressed whether or not the classroom teacher demonstrated the three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy. The participant's perceptions were elucidated by the last three themes: Theme 7: teachers' expectations; Theme 8: building relationships, and Theme 9: relating content to life. Chapter 5 discusses the findings of the study along with the limitations, implications, and future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Study Background

The intent of this study was to elicit the perceptions of African American male secondary students regarding the care they received from their teachers. The exploration occurred by employing a qualitative research design with five male participants who were enrolled in a non-public school in the greater Los Angeles area. The study was guided by the following four research questions: (a) How do African American male secondary students define care? (b) To what extent do African American males' perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experiences? (c) Based on student perceptions, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher? And (d) How are the suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher, according to African American males perceptions?

The purpose of this qualitative study was to listen to the voices of African American male students with disabilities in specialized secondary educational settings to better understand how the care of a teacher supported them in their educational experiences and to make recommendations as to how best meet the needs of this specific group of students. The aim of the semistructured interviews was to hear the thoughts and perceptions of teacher care directly from the participants because their voices have been missing from the literature.

Throughout the study, I kept a journal to record my thoughts following each interview and to acknowledge my biases. As an African American woman conducting a study involving African American young men, I recognized how my thoughts and perceptions could influence

my interpretation and synthesis of the findings. As a former school psychologist, I understood the demands that can be placed upon staff to remove a student who is disruptive from a classroom, or from a school. In reviewing the background data of the study participants, I had several questions related to the special education assessment and placement decisions that were made on behalf of the students. For example, I wondered about the schools in which each participant was assessed. That lead me to think about each school's special education percentage, what the demographics of the school were and the background of the school psychologist, teachers, and principal. As each participant shared the incident that he felt led to the recommendation that he be placed in a non-public school, I wondered what other interventions had been implemented on the school site prior to making the recommendation. I acknowledge that the behaviors that were exhibited by the participants prior to non-public school placement would be considered atypical for elementary school students but I was also concerned that the recommended placements were more restrictive due to behavior and not always academics. Upon uncovering the fact that three of the five participants experienced a change in eligibility from other health impairment to emotional disturbance, I again had questions with regard to what additional supports were provided prior to a change in eligibility. While this study focused on the student's perceptions of the care he received from his teachers, I must acknowledge that the overrepresentation of African American males in special education may have also contributed to their placement in the non-public school setting.

Background data were gathered for each participant and commonalities among participants were noted, including: the participants not having an awareness of their eligibility; being placed in the non-public school setting during elementary school for the majority of the

participants and middle school for one participant and remaining in that school into high school; that four of the five participants were found not eligible for special education at the time of their initial evaluations but all four were reassessed within 2 years and were found eligible; and, finally, that four of the five young men were found eligible under the category of other health impairment (OHI). However, prior to placement in the non-public school, the eligibilities of two of the young men were changed to emotional disturbance (ED).

I believe that my positionality positively impacted my ability to work with the participants because the participants were students in my school. Furthermore, as an African American woman interviewing African American participants, I believe that the students felt comfortable sharing with me. By virtue of the fact that there was commonality in our ethnicity, I had the opportunity to create a safe environment in which the participants were able to disclose the information that they shared, and I was able to gain insight into their lived experiences. I did not take that lightly and wanted to ensure that the voices of the students would be heard. In addition to the commonality with the participants, my orientation as an educator who believes deeply in the development of caring relationships with students had an impact on how I interpreted the dynamic between the teacher and the student based on the examples provided by the participants. Over the years as a former classroom teacher, school psychologist, and school site administrator, I have my own examples of caring relationships with students and teachers and how those connections have impacted the lives of African American males. As the participants shared their perceptions, I interpreted the data from a place of loyalty to the students and a desire to create an environment that was conducive to learning. I recognized that, in this study, I was focused on hearing from the students alone. Whether the participants' perceptions

were reality or not, I could not deny how they perceived the care of the teacher. The experiences that I have had over the last 20 plus years in education led me to not question the perceptions of the students but fueled me to move forward in the work of ensuring that caring teachers are in front of African American male students.

The theoretical framework that guided this study included DisCrit, the ethic of care, and culturally relevant pedagogy in an effort for students to share their perceptions regarding the extent to which the ethic of care was demonstrated in the classroom through culturally relevant practices. The next section will include a discussion of the nine themes that emerged from the data. The four research questions will be answered through the discussion of the themes.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study indicated that the participants were able to identify what it meant for their teachers to care and how the care of the teacher affected their educational experiences. Additionally, without necessarily having the language to describe Noddings's (1984) ethic of care in schools, the participants identified the components of care demonstrated by their teachers as well as the suppositions of Ladson-Billings's (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy.

Theme 1: Redirection and Encouragement

One of the ways in which the study participants defined care was by the redirection and encouragement they received from their teachers. Redirection and encouragement may have come in the form of the classroom teacher's effort to facilitate class attendance and assisting the students to complete classwork even when they presented with difficult behaviors. Howard's (2001) study regarding students' perceptions of the learning environment was congruent with the description provided by this study's participants. Howard found that caring teachers provided

positive reinforcement and praised students for accomplishments. The current study participants also suggested that if the teacher did not attempt to encourage them to attend class that was an indicator that the teacher did not care. Based on the study participants' educational experiences, it is important to recognize the integral role that encouragement and redirection plays in the lives of the students. It is evident that students had a need to feel cared for by adults. This finding is consistent with Schussler and Collins's (2006) finding that students wanted to be cared for. The data from the study supported the need for a caring teacher to provide direction and encouragement to students. Redirection and encouragement by the teacher dealt with the participant's disposition toward class and the teacher's ability to encourage students to attend and remain in class. For instance, the participants had a desire to remain or attend class but they were influenced by the behavior of their peers. If the classroom teacher encouraged them to attend or remain in class, they would then be able to attend class without having their friends question why they were attending. When the teacher redirected and encouraged class attendance, the participants believed that the teacher cared for them.

Theme 2: Willingness to Provide Help

The study participants indicated that if their teachers cared for them, they would exhibit a willingness to help them academically. This finding is echoed in the literature regarding student perceptions and care. Wentzel's (1997) study findings were consistent in that examples of caring included the teacher making a special effort; the teacher took time to make sure that students understood what was happening in the class but the teacher also listened and asked questions of the students. In the non-public school setting, teachers have an expanding role that goes above

and beyond the presentation of curriculum. Students expected a teacher who cared to be willing to provide help academically.

The first two themes addressed the first research question, how do African American male secondary students with special needs define care? In the review of literature, care was described in terms of relational and academic caring. The two themes that emerged from the data were consistent with the literature on caring. Based on the work of Noddings (2005), care is defined as a connection or encounter between two human beings, a carer (the teacher) and the cared-for (the student). Based on the definitions of care provided by the study participants and the definitions of care outlined in the literature, the African American male students in this study felt cared for when their teachers demonstrated relational and academic behaviors of caring. The students appreciated the way in which the teachers engaged relationally with them, and it was evident in the definitions that students provided. African American male students need to feel cared for in responsive schools (Davis, 1993).

Theme 3: Provision of Support by Teachers

The study participants described the provision of support by teachers as behaviors in which the teachers motivated the students, where the teacher was sincere and honest, and where teachers held students accountable. The provision of support by teachers varied from Theme one, redirection and encouragement, because the provision of support highlights the desire for teachers to hold students accountable in a supportive manner, whereas redirection and encouragement focused on the teacher's ability to redirect students to engage them in class. The motivation from teachers was for students to be engaged in the schooling experience. Gatlin and Wilson (2016) determined that teachers who supported the academic success of African

American students held the students to high expectations, provided support, and helped to facilitate organization. While the teachers understood that the student had a disability, they did not allow the disability to be used as an excuse. The current study participants indicated that when the teachers exhibited a willingness to support, their educational experiences were positively impacted. Students in the non-public school setting under the eligibility criteria of emotional disturbance and other health impairment are oftentimes placed as a result of their behavior. Academically, the student is cognitively capable of completing assignments. When teachers lower their expectations based on a student's disability rather than supporting the student and holding them accountable for meeting the high expectations, students perceive the action as a lack of caring.

Theme 4: Opportunities for Increased Support by Teachers

When teachers exhibited behaviors that were perceived as punitive or shaming by the study participants, the behaviors were equated with a lack of support on the part of the teacher. The attitude of the teacher impacted whether or not the study participants received support from the teacher. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) determined that a teacher's perceptions of students impacted the way in which the teacher supported the student. If the teacher perceives that the student is disrespectful, not academically astute, or not motivated, the teacher may not demonstrate a willingness to support the student, which would negatively impact the student's educational experience. Given the experiences that African American male students with special needs have had in school that have led to the recommendation for a non-public school, teachers must approach students from the mindset that all students are capable of high academic achievement and interact with them from that mindset. Teachers are expected to exhibit

professionalism despite a student's disposition. If students perceived that the teachers lacked professionalism, the students did not perceive that the teacher cared.

Themes 3 and 4 addressed the second research question, which was, to what extent does African American male secondary students with special needs perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experience? The data indicated that a student's perceptions of teacher care are affected by whether or not the teacher provided support to the student. If the teacher provided support to the student, the educational experience was positively affected; however, if the student's perceived a lack of teacher support, the educational experience would be negatively affected. I chose to name theme four *Opportunities for Increased Support by Teachers* to model how teachers would model care for their students by specifically modeling the component of confirmation. I chose to not use a negative title for the theme because I wanted teachers to receive the information in a nonthreatening way, or to confirm who they are as teachers, not focusing on the negative behavior, which is what is expected of teachers when interacting with students in classrooms where the ethic of care is demonstrated.

Theme 5: Teachers Speaking to Students

The study participants indicated that when the teacher took the time to speak to them both inside and outside of the classroom—whether to discuss academics or behavior—thus was demonstrative of care. This finding is consistent with the work of Ferreira and Bosworth (2001). In their study, teenage students described caring as teachers who checked on student progress, provided support and guidance both inside and outside of the class, and those who were honest, fair, and direct. The importance of teachers engaging in conversation with students about the situations that affect their lives is an indication of the ethic of care in the classroom. Noddings

(2005) described the importance of the relationship between the one caring (the teacher) and the one cared-for (student), stating that the teacher receives the student as a human being, not judging the behavior but showing care to the student as a person and not solely focusing on the classroom content. By speaking with the student about various topics, the teacher has the opportunity to model caring, engage the student in dialogue, and confirm the student. This theme addresses the teacher speaking with the students about the situations that are important to the students. This theme varied from Theme eight, building relationships, because of the focus on speaking specifically about student-generated content.

Theme 6: Teachers' Disposition

The study participants described characteristics of the teacher's disposition as including the teacher's tone of voice as well as the teacher's ability to show common courtesy by saying hello and good-bye and being nice and kind. McIntyre and Battle (1998) conducted a study to determine the traits of good teachers as determined by students. The students identified that good teachers were those who liked kids, were nice people, friendly, cared about the students, listened to the students, and respected the opinions of the students. The literature was consistent with the findings of the current study. Teachers spend a significant amount of time with students and have the opportunity to demonstrate the components of the ethic of care in the classroom and in their interactions with students. Noddings (1984) stated that teachers must model for students by creating caring relations with them. In so doing, students are learning how to care for others.

Themes 5 and 6 addressed the third research question, which was, based on African American male students with special needs perceptions of care, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher? The four components of the ethic of

care as described by Noddings (1984) include modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. The components of the ethic of care that were demonstrated in the study were modeling, dialogue, and confirmation. Noddings (2005) stated that modeling was the action of showing students how to care, which was evident by the relationships that the one caring (teachers) had with students. Noddings (2002) stated that, by engaging in dialogue, we learn what the other needs. Dialogue is a way of asking about the cared-for. It is a way of being in relation with others. The teachers engaged in dialogue with students regarding their life experiences and the students valued those interactions. Noddings (1984) stated that when the teacher showed confirmation, that had the power to nurture or to destroy the sense of caring within the student. The teachers demonstrated confirmation through their interactions with the students. The component of practice was not evidenced in the findings for the current study. Practice requires the student to have opportunities to show care for others through practice. While there was evidence of modeling, dialogue, and confirmation, there was no explicit opportunity for practice described by the current study participants. This will be discussed further in the implications section of this chapter.

Theme 7: Teachers' Expectations

The theme of teachers' expectations encompassed both the concept of teachers holding students to high expectations as well as teachers who set low expectations for their students. The participants in the current study indicated that when teachers required them to think about their learning or when the teachers had the ability to scaffold assignments in an effort to support the students and provide the opportunity to access the material, teachers were holding students to high expectations. The study findings was consistent with the work of Gay (2002), which

determined that African American students performed best when the teacher demonstrated care for the student while holding the student to high expectations. Rosenbloom and Way (2004) concluded that students in their qualitative study equated caring as the teacher helping students when they did not understand the material, maintaining high expectations, and encouraging students to study and achieve academically. This finding is consistent with the current study. Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2005) expressed that a teacher demonstrated the belief that all students are capable of academic success when they hold students to high expectations.

Conversely, the current study also identified behaviors that were indicative of the teacher holding low expectations for the students such as a lack of rigor in assignments. In Garibaldi's (1992) study, 60% of African American males felt that their teachers should push them harder, and 40% felt that their teachers did not set high goals for them. Culturally relevant educators hold all students to high standards whether or not they present a disability, low academic skills, or behavioral challenges.

Theme 8: Building Relationships

The students felt that their teachers were intentional about building relationships with them because they listened, helped them when they needed help, and addressed their needs on an individual basis rather than solely focusing on the group. While there are elements indicative of building relationships in other themes, this theme specifically speaks to the intentionality of building or creating connections with students. Hollins and Spencer (1990) conducted a study on the schooling experiences of African American students and found that positive relationships between teachers and students affected academic achievement, teachers were responsive to the individual student's lives, which led to increased effort in school. The findings were consistent

with the study participants' examples, acknowledging that it is necessary for a teacher to be caring. Similarly, Ladson-Billings (1995) stated that teachers who engage in culturally relevant methods purposefully create social interactions with students that support them becoming academically successful, culturally competent, and critically conscious. The current study participants provided examples of interactions that they had had with their teachers, and the data supported the idea that if the student had positive interactions with the teachers, they performed better academically. Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) stated that if students with special needs perceived a lack of connection with their teachers, it hindered their learning and the ability to build relationships with the teacher. Caring educators must be intentional about the manner in which social relations are constructed.

Theme 9: Relating Content to Life

The current study found that the participants believed the teacher's ability to relate the content to their lives was important for the learning process. Furthermore, the participants put forth greater effort and were more invested in their learning when the teachers provided opportunities for them to learn by doing or creating when completing assignments. These findings were consistent with the findings of Hollins and Spencer (1990), where it was determined that students preferred teachers who allowed them to actualize their ideas in completing assignments and becoming engaged in classroom discussions. Teachers used their lived experiences as well as real world situations to further engage students in the classroom. Lee (1999) determined when conducting an ethnographic study that one of the themes that emerged with regard to the underachievement of African American and Latino students was that the classrooms were teacher centered and did not include projects and activities but focused on

lecture with the teacher as the keeper of knowledge. The current study participants also shared that, in their classes, they typically completed packets of work that required an over reliance on a textbook and less on discussion and facilitation by the teacher. As a result, the classes lacked rigor. Ladson-Billings (2005) stated that not only must teachers be passionate about knowledge and learning, but also that assessment of student learning must be multifaceted, providing opportunities for multiple ways for students to show mastery. The current study participants felt that being given the opportunity to utilize projects in class would support them in the learning process.

Themes 7, 8, and 9 addressed the fourth research question, how are the suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher, according to the perceptions of African American male secondary students with special needs? The three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy are conceptions of self and others, the manner in which social relations are constructed and conceptions of knowledge. The study participants identified that their teachers believed that all students were capable of academic success, which was an indicator of the first supposition of culturally relevant pedagogy: conceptions of self and others.

The manner in which social relations are constructed is the second supposition. The maintenance of fluid student-teacher relationships as described in Theme 8, building relationships, demonstrated that students felt this was indicative of caring as well as culturally relevant pedagogy. The third supposition of culturally relevant pedagogy is conceptions of knowledge, whereby study participants spoke of the teacher's ability to scaffold learning while

holding them to high expectations—but they also spoke of the lack of assessment options available to them.

Several elements of the suppositions were documented through the study, acknowledging that culturally relevant pedagogy as a practice of educators supports African American male secondary students in their educational experiences. There were also indicators that certain elements of culturally relevant pedagogy were lacking in some of the classrooms. In order for African American male secondary students with special needs to thrive academically, the classroom teacher must consistently demonstrate the suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Several limitations could have affected this study's outcome. One limitation was access to African American male students with special needs in secondary non-public school settings. Although the population of African American males in Victory School was 17%, obtaining consent or assent for participation impacted the number of participants in the study. Another limitation was that, based on the transience rate for students in non-public school, the study might have been impacted, resulting in fewer than five participants, which would have further impacted the results of the study. In addition to limitations, delimiting factors impacted the study.

One of the delimitations was that there was only one school utilized for the study. Although the literature discusses the fact that African American students are more likely to be served in specialized settings such as non-public schools more often than their Caucasian peers (USDOE, 2016), Victory school may not be representative of all non-public schools. Focusing

on one school allowed the opportunity to gain deeper information from the participants. Another delimitation was that the study focused on African American male secondary students. I addressed secondary students because there has been research conducted regarding students with special needs, but based on the high population of African American male students in special education programs and specialized settings in particular, I believed it important to focus on this specific subgroup of students. This study provides information for a subset of students which can serve as the foundation for further study.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework utilized in this study required components of three theories in an effort to address a specific topic for which no literature existed. It was important that the study be grounded in hearing the voices of a specific subset of students. DisCrit theory in education addresses the ways that race, racism, disability, and ableism impact the interactions, procedures, conversations, and institutions of education (Connor et al., 2016). By employing tenet four of DisCrit theory, the voices of African American males (marginalized populations) were acknowledged by including them in the research. Student voice is essential in determining the best way to support African American male students with special needs in specialized settings.

While the literature looks at students with special needs, there is not disaggregated data with respect to the perceptions of African American male secondary students in specialized settings and the care they receive from their teachers. The research has suggested the need for caring teachers in education and the development of positive teacher-student relationships but the work of Noddings (1984) had been criticized as not relevant for students of color. Although

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy does not address the components of a moral education as described by Noddings, it does acknowledge the culture of the students. By combining the three theories to address the research questions, this study acknowledges the literature stating that caring is necessary to education and that culturally relevant pedagogy and practices are necessary to support African American students. Focusing the study on the non-public school setting created an opportunity to hear directly from the students in the setting regarding their perceptions of teacher care. The findings of this study are congruent with the literature in that caring is important in the educational experiences of students. This study provides a foundation to show that caring is important in the educational experiences of African American male secondary students with special needs; and, furthermore, that culturally relevant pedagogy and practices empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by affirming the cultural identity of students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The utilization of both ethic of care theory and culturally relevant pedagogy approaches the care of African American male secondary students from a both/and perspective rather than an either/or, meaning that in an effort to better support this specific subset of students, educators must employ the elements of both theories rather than choosing one theory or the other. The results of this study indicate that the success of African American male secondary students with special needs in specialized settings is predicated upon the teacher's ability to demonstrate the components of the ethic of care while employing culturally relevant practices. My goal was not to create a new theory, but it is important to look further into how ethic of care theory and culturally relevant pedagogy might co-exist to develop a framework for schools in supporting African American male students with special needs in non-public or other specialized settings.

Implications for Administrators

The study provided an opportunity for me as an administrator to hear the lived experiences of the students with whom I work on a daily basis. The students were open and willing to share their perceptions regarding the care they received by teachers. If the goal of non-public schools were to support students so that they are able to return to their schools of residence, it would be important for administrators to look at how best to support the students in the classroom. The interview protocol that was utilized during the study can be used as a tool for administrators and/or other support staff to meet with students in an effort to hear from them in their own voices. The purpose is not to catch teachers who are doing wrong but rather to hear the perceptions of students to be able to better support them in the classroom. Morse (1994) stated that caring is important in working with students with behavioral challenges but it is often neglected because of the need to maintain control in the classroom. By listening to students and possibly involving students in the process when new teachers are hired, schools can truly become centers of care.

As a non-public school administrator, I find that it can be difficult to secure the right teachers. Often times, teachers have had experience working in a traditional school prior to coming to the non-public school setting and the transition can be challenging. Based on the data regarding the need for caring teachers, administrators need to explicitly look for a teacher's ability to care for students in the manner in which students know and feel cared about (Morse, 1994). During the process of interviewing potential teachers, there should be an opportunity for candidates to participate in activities that would highlight their ability to care for students. For example, one way of gaining insight into a potential candidates ability to care would be to

provide scenarios where the candidates are required to explain how they might approach a situation. This would give the hiring committee an opportunity to gather whether or not they see evidence of the elements of care in the candidates' everyday practice.

Administrators must also provide professional development trainings for teachers and other school staff, thereby reinforcing the concept that working in a specialized setting requires an integration of discipline and care. This can be difficult because care does not refer to a set of methods or behaviors, it has more to do with the attitude and style of the teacher and the experience as perceived by the students (Scarlett, Ponte, & Singh, 2009). Non-public school settings should be centers of care. A professional development module with data from this study is included in the appendix for use with school staff.

The professional development module is entitled, Schools as Centers of Care. The purpose of the professional development training is to engage the staff in dialogue around the concept of schools being centers of care. This means that schools make a conscious decision to implement caring when working with African American male students with special needs in an effort to positively affect their educational experiences. The module provides the background research and the data from this study, including definitions of caring provided by students while engaging the participants in activities that require them to reflect on their interactions with their current or previous students. This module also includes recommendations and next steps for schools.

Implications for Teachers

Teachers in the non-public school setting are working with students who have not been successful in traditional school settings. Additionally, working with students who are eligible for

special education under the category of emotional disturbance can be a challenging task. The literature states that students require the care of a teacher (Siddle-Walker, 1996). Some of the literature speaks to the importance of having caring teachers when working with students with special needs (Morse, 1994). The participants in this study stated that it was important to have teachers who care. One way to better support teachers working in non-public schools and other specialized settings is to provide professional development trainings to better understand the need for a caring teacher, which includes the definition of caring as expressed by the students themselves. Specifically hearing the perceptions of students will help teachers to better understand the lived experiences of the students they have chosen to serve.

An additional implication for teachers would be to intentionally develop lessons that teach students about the various eligibility categories and/or disabilities to help them identify characteristics that would give them insight into their own strengths and areas of need in order to advocate for themselves throughout their school career. Although the aforementioned recommendation is an implication for teachers, schools would need to adopt this practice as part of a school-wide initiative in an effort to be consistent across the school and not limit the practice to one single teacher. This could be implemented through an advisory program within the school day.

Curricular Implications

Two areas were identified during the current study that have implications for Victory School. The first area was regarding the demonstration of the elements of care by the classroom teacher. The second area was regarding the fact that assessment must be multifaceted, providing opportunities for multiple forms of excellence. Each will be addressed in further detail.

Based on the findings of the current study, the components of the ethic of care that were demonstrated by the teachers were modeling, dialogue, and confirmation. The fourth element that was absent from the study was practice. Noddings (2002) expressed that students must be engaged in caregiving activities in order to develop the capacity to care for others. Non-public schools serving African American males may want to consider adopting a philosophy by which students are explicitly provided opportunities to engage in care giving. Rather than solely focusing on a community service requirement as a school, teachers have the ability to create lesson and unit plans that lend themselves to the component of practice. If practice becomes part of the curriculum, students are engaged in activities that enhance the maintenance of caring (Noddings, 2005). Depending on the activities that are provided as opportunities for caring, students may engage in projects throughout the school year.

The second area that will be addressed is the use of project-based learning and other types of assessment options. The third supposition of culturally relevant pedagogy is conceptions of knowledge and includes the concept of a multifaceted approach to assessment in which teachers use multiple measures to show evidence of mastery of content by students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The current study indicated that teachers at Victory School primarily utilized paper and pencil assignments and assessments as evidence of student mastery. The study participants shared that they felt more engaged and interested in their classes when they had the opportunity to complete projects to show mastery of content rather than solely completing paper and pencil tasks. Implementing project-based learning activities as well as other means of showing mastery, such as presentations, provides African American male students with opportunities to construct and share their knowledge with others. Culturally relevant educators

recognize and honor that knowledge is not static, but is shared, recycled, and constructed (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Opportunities for African American male students with special needs to learn by doing will likely increase their participation, engagement, and interest in school.

Future Research

This study addressed a topic on which there has been limited research. African American male secondary non-public school students with special needs perceptions of the care received by their teachers had not been specifically addressed until this study. The data for special education had not been disaggregated by gender at the national, state, or local level; as a result, there has not been research specific to the needs of African American males in this area. As the study was being designed, there were several areas that came up in the review of the literature regarding the overrepresentation of African American students in special education programs as well as the underachievement of African American males. The literature regarding care did not solely focus on African American males in particular or students with special needs. For the purposes of this study, I chose to focus solely on the perception of care through the eyes of African American males in non-public school setting.

Going forward, several areas need to be addressed that will provide more insight into the necessity of care on the part of the teacher in order to improve the educational experiences of African American male secondary students with special needs in non-public or specialized settings. One area of future research would be to conduct the same study at different non-public schools in an effort to determine whether the data remain consistent. By collecting data from different sites, similarities and differences in the experiences of African American males in different areas would be addressed utilizing the current study as a comparison group. Guba

(1981) spoke of transferability. By conducting studies at different schools, I would be able to utilize the thick descriptive data to make comparisons across contexts (Guba, 1981).

Another area for future research would be to conduct observations in the classrooms to further corroborate the findings from this study. Gathering observation data would allow for what Guba (1981) described as dependability. By utilizing overlapping methods of interviews and observation, I would be able to compensate for weaknesses that may have occurred in utilizing solely one method. The observations would hopefully complement the information collected during the semistructured interviews.

A third area for future research would be to interview the parents/guardians of the participants to gather their perceptions of the care that their African American male students receive from the teacher. Through utilizing interview methodology with students and parents/guardians in addition to observation of the students/teachers, multiple data sources, methods, and perspectives would be implemented, allowing for triangulation as a means of establishing confirmability (Guba, 1981). The use of triangulation in a study is also a means of establishing credibility. Denzin (1978) named three subtypes of data triangulation, including time, space, and persons. The purpose of triangulation is to use different data sources, methods, investigators and/or perspectives in approaching the study (Denzin, 1978). By conducting the study at different non-public schools and including another method of data collection, I am able to analyze the data from multiple perspectives.

A final area for future research with regard to care would be to look deeper into the caring dynamic and student perceptions by thinking about the factors that influence a young man's perception of caring and what factors have influenced the development of the kind of care

that African American males expect to receive from their teachers. Additionally, a component of the study could include teacher interviews because teachers care differentially, and it would be useful to understand the factors that influence the teacher's ability and willingness to care. The teacher's life experiences shape their perceptions and implicit and explicit biases.

Although the topic of this study addressed student perceptions of care, I believe that it would be important to address the overrepresentation of African American male secondary students in specialized settings such as non-public schools by again privileging the voices of the students who have been traditionally left out of the research. This area of study would address how the students were placed in the non-public school setting. The study would address the commonalities that were noted across the participants with regard to assessment, eligibility, and grade level at the time of placement (specifically, the elementary level). Additionally, it would be important to look at the disparity in suspension rates with regard to African American males with special needs and their White counterparts. Barton-Vasquez (2018) recently conducted a study, which addressed the disproportionality in special education with regard to suspensions. Barton-Vasquez's findings provide current data regarding students in Los Angeles. The background information gathered from the participants in this study indicated the prevalence of suspension among the participants. Numerous studies have addressed disproportionality in suspension rates for African American males and African American male students with special needs, in particular.

In line with future research regarding disproportionality, research addressing the systemic issues that have led to African American male secondary students being placed in non-public school settings including disproportionality, implicit bias, and discrimination based on the

perceptions of the students would draw attention to phenomena that have been researched but not often included student voice.

Related to the systemic issues that led to placement in the non-public school, another area of future research would be to study non-public schools rates of return of students to their schools of residence. There may be systemic issues that act as barriers to a student's return to the school of residence.

I believe that the perspective addressed in this study is important because the voices of the marginalized are too often left out of the research. In this case, the participants were able to share their experiences, memories, and perceptions. Continued scholarship in this area is necessary to acknowledging this distinct population of students; those in specialized special education settings such as non-public schools.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored African American male secondary students with special needs' perceptions of the care they received by their teachers. The theoretical framework proposed that the demonstration of the components of the ethic of care—including modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings, 1984)—as well as the three suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy—including conceptions of self and others, the manner in which social relations are constructed, and conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1995) —were necessary in order to support African American male secondary students with special needs in specialized settings. Furthermore, African American male students with special needs were deemed the most appropriate participants to share their perceptions as their voices are often missing from the literature as described by tenet four of DisCrit (Connor et al., 2016). According

to the five participants interviewed in this study, they agreed with Noddings (2005) in that to support them academically, the teacher must see them as human beings, in a nonjudgmental way, caring for them as people, rather than solely focusing on the classroom content. Furthermore, the participants agreed with Ladson-Billings (1995) in that the student teacher relationship is an integral component of the educational experiences of students.

I became interested in this particular topic based on my interactions with my students in the non-public school setting. One student in particular communicated that he did not believe that the teachers cared for the students because of the teacher's actions. Based on the themes that emerged from the current study, it is evident that the teacher's actions play an integral role in the educational experiences of African American males. The nine themes revealed the extent to which the components of the ethic of care and the suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy were demonstrated in the classroom through the interactions between the teacher and the student. The nine themes were: (a) redirection and encouragement, (b) willingness to help, (c) provision of support by teachers, (d) opportunities for increased support by teachers, (e) teachers speaking to students, (f) teachers' disposition, (g) teachers' expectations, (h) building relationships, and (i) relating content to life. As evidenced by this study, if students do not perceive that the teacher cares for them, it will be difficult for a teacher to successfully engage students in the learning experience (Polite, 1994;Vega et al., 2015). Each of the themes points back to the literature on care and the importance of teacher care in the educational experiences of students. The results of this study indicate that the care of a teacher is important in the educational experiences of African American male students.

African American male secondary students have been overrepresented in special education programs (Artiles, 2013), and they have had below average academic achievement (Brown, 2011). But hearing what this small subset of students said they needed from a teacher, I believe it is time for us to change our approach to schooling. As Noddings said, "No matter how hard teachers try to care, if the caring is not received by students, the claim 'they don't care' has some validity" (2005, p. 15). Now is the time for us to support African American male students with the care they deserve.

APPENDIX A
Loyola Marymount University
Informed Consent Form

Date of Preparation: September 21, 2017

Loyola Marymount University
IRB # LMU IRB 2017 FA 13

In Our Own Voices: Perceptions of Teacher Care Among African American Male Secondary Students with Special Needs

1) I hereby authorize Didi Watts M.A., a doctoral student at Loyola Marymount University, to include my child/ward in the following research study: *In Our Own Voices: Perceptions of Teacher Care Among African American Male Secondary Students with Special Needs*

2) I have been asked to allow my child/ward to participate in a research project that is designed to listen to the voices of African American males secondary students with special needs in non-public school settings regarding the care that they receive by their teachers. The interviews will document the personal experiences and perspectives of my child/ward.

3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my child/ward's inclusion in this project is that he is an African American male student who is currently in a non-public school setting.

4) I understand that if my child/ward is a participant, he will be asked to participate in three one-hour interviews and his responses will be audio-recorded. The interviews will take place over the course of two months. The interviews will be professionally transcribed. Additionally, he will be asked to meet with Didi Watts for no more than one hour to review the transcription information and make sure that it is accurate.

   The investigator will use the results to make recommendations to teachers and administrators regarding how to best meet the educational needs of African American male students with special needs in non-public school settings.

   These procedures have been explained to me by Didi Watts, M.A.

5) I understand that my child/ward will be audiotaped, with his consent, in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these audio files will be used for research purposes only and that my child/ward's identity will not be disclosed. I understand that the results of the study will be published or presented publically but that my child/ward's identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the audio files will be stored on CD after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that my child/ward has the right to review

the audio files and the transcription of the interviews made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6) I understand that the interviews will take place in Ms. Didi's office during the elective period such as woodshop, art, or music or during lunch so that my child/ward will not miss core instructional time. All attempts will be made to stagger the interview sessions so that my child/ward will not miss all three hours in any one particular class.

7) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: The questions that will be asked in the study may evoke feelings of sadness as my child/ward shares his past and current educational experiences. Additionally, my child/ward may not be accustomed to sharing his personal stories so he could experience discomfort or be nervous. I understand that his school clinician will be available to process with him if needed following the interviews. The following clinicians can be contacted through the school. Mr. London, LMFT; Ms. Robles, MSW; Ms. Halstead, MSW; Ms. Ford, MFT. I understand that the following community agencies can also provide counseling services for my child/ward if necessary at no charge: Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic, (323) 290-8360; Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, (310) 677-7808 or (310) 778-9593; or Augustus Hawkins Mental Health Center, (310) 668-4272.

8) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are hearing the voices of African American male students that are often not reflected in the literature with regards to the care received from their teachers and this could impact teachers as well as the people in authority to change practices in non-public schools.

9) I understand that Didi Watts, the principal investigator, who can be reached at the school will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

10) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained.

11) I understand that I have the right to refuse for my child/ward to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice to my child/ward's continued enrollment in the non-public school of attendance or in his relationship with Ms. Didi.

12) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my child/ward's participation before the completion of the study.

13) I understand that no information that identifies my child/ward will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

14) I understand that my child/ward has the right to refuse to answer any question that he may not wish to answer.

15) I understand that my child/ward will receive a $5 Target gift card for his participation in this study; I further understand that even if he withdraws before the study is completed he will still receive $5 gift card. I understand that in the event his participation is terminated through no fault of his, he will be still be compensated in the amount of a $5 gift card.

16) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Moffet, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 at david.moffet@lmu.edu.

17) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Parent/Guardian's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B
Loyola Marymount University
Participant Assent Form
(Ages 12-14)

Date of Preparation: September 21, 2017

Loyola Marymount University
IRB # LMU IRB 2017 FA 13

In Our Own Voices: Perceptions of Teacher Care Among African American Male Secondary Students with Special Needs

1) I give Didi Watts M.A., a doctoral student at Loyola Marymount University, permission to include me in the following research study: *In Our Own Voices: Perceptions of Teacher Care Among African American Male Secondary Students with Special Needs*

2) I have been asked to participate in a research project to listen to the voices of African American male students with special needs, in grades 6-12, who are in non-public school settings about the care that they receive from their teachers. The interviews will document my personal experiences and perspectives.

3) I have been told that the reason for my participation in this project is that I am an African American male student who is enrolled in a non-public school setting.

4) I understand that if I am chosen to be a participant, I will be asked to participate in three one-hour interviews and what I say will be audio-recorded. The interviews will take place over the course of two months. The interviews will be professionally transcribed. Additionally, I will be asked to meet with Didi Watts for no more than one hour to review the transcription to review the information and make sure that it is accurate.

   Didi Watts will use the results to make recommendations to teachers and administrators about how to best meet the educational needs of African American male students with special needs in non-public school settings.

   These procedures have been explained to me by Didi Watts, M.A.

5) I understand that I will be audiotaped, with my permission, during the interviews. It has been explained to me that these audio files will be used for research purposes only and no one will know that I am participating. I understand that the results of the study will be published or presented publically but that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been told that the audio files will be stored on CD after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the audio files made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6) I understand that each interview will take place in Ms. Didi's office during my elective time such as woodshop, art, or music or during lunch so that I will not miss core instructional time. All attempts will be made to stagger the interview sessions so I will not miss all three hours in any one class.

7) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: The questions that will be asked in the study may cause me to experience feelings of sadness as I share my past and current educational experiences. Additionally, I may not be used to sharing my personal stories so I could experience discomfort or be nervous. I understand that my school clinician will be available to process with me if needed following the interviews. I can contact Ms. Ford, MFT, through the school. I understand that the following community agencies can also provide counseling services for me if necessary at no charge: Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic, (323) 290-8360; Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, (310) 677-7808 or (310) 778-9593; or Augustus Hawkins Mental Health Center, (310) 668-4272.

8) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study of hearing the voices of African American male students that are sometimes missing in the literature with regards to the care received from their teachers and this could impact teachers as well as the people in charge to change how things are done in non-public schools.

9) I understand that Didi Watts, the principal investigator, who can be reached at the school will answer any questions I may have at any time about the details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

10) If changes have to be made to the study or if the use of the information is to be changed, I will be told and I will have to give my permission again.

11) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without being worried about my ability to stay enrolled in my current non-public school or being worried about my relationship with Ms. Didi.

12) I understand that events may come up which might cause the investigator to stop me from participating before the completion of the study.

13) I understand that no information that identifies me will be given out without my permission except as specifically required by law.

14) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

15) I understand that I will receive a $5 Target gift card for my participation in this study; I understand that I will receive the $5 gift card even if I do not complete the interview. Additionally, if I cannot participate for some other reason, I will still receive the $5 Target gift card.

16) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Moffet, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review

Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 at david.moffet@lmu.edu.

17) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C
Loyola Marymount University
Participant Assent Form

(Ages 15-17)

Date of Preparation: September 21, 2017

Loyola Marymount University
IRB # LMU IRB 2017 FA 13

In Our Own Voices: Perceptions of African American Male Secondary Students with Special Needs with Regards to the Care Shown by Teachers

1) I hereby authorize Didi Watts M.A., a doctoral student at Loyola Marymount University, to include me in the following research study: *In Our Own Voices: Perceptions of African American Male Secondary Students with Special Needs with Regards to the Care Shown by Teachers.*

2) I have been asked to participate in a research project that is designed to listen to the voices of African American male secondary students with special needs in non-public school settings regarding the care that they receive from their teachers. The interviews will document my personal experiences and perspectives.

3) It has been explained to me that the reason for my participation in this project is that I am an African American male student who is currently enrolled in a non-public school setting.

4) I understand that if I participate, I will be asked to participate in three one-hour interviews and my responses will be audio-recorded. The interviews will take place over the course of two months. The interviews will be professionally transcribed. Additionally, I will be asked to meet with Didi Watts for no more than one hour to review the transcription information and make sure that it is accurate.

   The investigator will use the results to make recommendations to teachers and administrators regarding how to best meet the educational needs of African American male students with special needs in non-public school settings.

   These procedures have been explained to me by Didi Watts, M.A.

5) I understand that I will be audiotaped, with my consent, during the interviews. It has been explained to me that these audio files will be used for research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed**.** I understand that the results of the study will be published or presented publically but that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the audio files will be stored on CD after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I

have the right to review the audio files made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.

6) I understand that the interviews will take place in Ms. Didi's office during the elective period such as woodshop, art, or music or during lunch so that my child/ward will not miss core instructional time. All attempts will be made to stagger the interview sessions so that I will not miss all three hours in any one particular class.

7) I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: The questions that will be asked in the study may evoke feelings of sadness as I share my past and current educational experiences. Additionally, I may not be accustomed to sharing my personal stories so I could experience discomfort or be nervous. I understand that my school clinician will be available to process with me if needed following the interviews. I can contact the following clinicians through the school. Mr. London, LMFT; Ms. Robles, MSW; Ms. Halstead, MSW; Ms. Ford, MFT. I understand that the following community agencies can also provide counseling services for me if necessary at no charge: Los Angeles Child Guidance Clinic, (323) 290-8360; Didi Hirsch Mental Health Services, (310) 677-7808 or (310) 778-9593; or Augustus Hawkins Mental Health Center, (310) 668-4272.

8) I also understand that the possible benefits of the study of hearing the voices of African American male students that are often not reflected in the literature with regards to the care received from their teachers and this could impact teachers as well as the people in authority to change practices in non-public schools.

9) I understand that Didi Watts, the principal investigator, who can be reached at the school will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.

10) If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained.

11) I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice to my continued enrollment in the non-public school of attendance or in my relationship with Ms. Didi.

12) I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.

13) I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.

14) I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.

15) I understand that I will receive a $5 Target gift card for my participation in this study; I further understand that even if I withdraw before the study is completed I will still receive a $5 gift card.

I understand that in the event my participation is terminated through no fault of mine, I will still be compensated in the amount of a $5 gift card.

16) I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Moffet, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 at david.moffet@lmu.edu.

17) In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX D
Loyola Marymount University
Experimental Subjects Bill of Rights

Pursuant to California Health and Safety Code §24172, I understand that I have the following rights as a participant in a research study:

1. I will be informed of the nature and purpose of the experiment.

2. I will be given an explanation of the procedures to be followed in the medical experiment, and any drug or device to be utilized.

3. I will be given a description of any attendant discomforts and risks to be reasonably expected from the study.

4. I will be given an explanation of any benefits to be expected from the study, if applicable.

5. I will be given a disclosure of any appropriate alternative procedures, drugs or devices that might be advantageous and their relative risks and benefits.

6. I will be informed of the avenues of medical treatment, if any, available after the study is completed if complications should arise.

7. I will be given an opportunity to ask any questions concerning the study or the procedures involved.

8. I will be instructed that consent to participate in the research study may be withdrawn at any time and that I may discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

9. I will be given a copy of the signed and dated written consent form.

10. I will be given the opportunity to decide to consent or not to consent to the study without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, coercion, or undue influence on my decision.

APPENDIX E
Semistructured Interview Protocol

In Our Own Voices: Perceptions of Teacher Care Among African American Male Secondary Students with Special Needs

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. By way of reminder, its purpose is to listen to the voices of African American male students with disabilities in specialized secondary educational settings to better understand how the care of a teacher supports them in their educational experience and to make recommendations as to how best meet the needs of this specific group of students. Your confidentiality and anonymity are protected. Our interviews are confidential, anonymous and confidential. [For first interview: I will use a pseudonym (not your real name). Do you have a preference of a name I should use? If so, what? For subsequent interviews: I will continue to use the pseudonym you gave me last time we met.]

Let me know if you are tired and need to take a break. The interview questions are a guide and I may ask additional questions during our interview to make sure I understand.

This is the [first, second, third] of three interviews with you and should last approximately one hour each.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview 1 – Background

1. What grade are you in currently?
2. How long have you been at this particular school?
3. Can you share about your home environment? (Where do you live? With whom do you live?)
4. Do you remember how old or what grade you were in when you received an IEP? Can you share that experience?
5. Is this your first NPS placement?
6. If yes, can you share why you were placed in NPS?
7. If no, how many NPS placements have you had and then share why you were placed in NPS?
8. Can you share about your educational experience before you came to non-public school?
9. Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to share?

Interview 2 – Addressing RQs 1 and 2

RQ 1- How do African American male secondary students with special needs define care?

RQ 2 - To what extent does African American males' secondary students with special needs perceptions of teacher care affect their educational experiences?

What does it mean for your teacher to care?

1) Do you have some stories or examples of when that has happened?
2) Do you believe that it is important that your teacher(s) care? Why or why not?
3) If I came into your classroom, what behaviors would I observe if your teacher(s) cared?
4) How do you know that your teacher(s) care? (Consider dialogue, body language and actions)
5) Do you get to express your own ideas and opinions in your classes? How?
6) How do you think this class relates to life outside of school, if at all? Explain?
7) How, at all, do you believe you have grown academically in the non-public setting?
8) How have your teacher(s) supported you academically?
9) If not, why do you believe you haven't grown academically?
10) Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to share?

Interview 3 – Addressing RQs 3 and 4

RQ 3 - Based on African American male secondary students with special needs perceptions of care, how are the components of the ethic of care demonstrated in the classroom by the teacher?

RQ 4 - How are the suppositions of culturally relevant pedagogy demonstrated by the classroom teacher, according to African American male secondary students with special needs perceptions?

1) Tell me about your interactions/dialogue with your teachers. What about those interactions demonstrate caring?
2) How, if at all, does the behavior of your teacher(s) influence you to care for others?
3) At some point in your school career, have you made a poor choice/decisions that your teacher learned about?
    a. Could you describe how your teacher(s) handled it?
    b. How did you feel about how the situation was handled?
4) What ways would you suggests to teachers and administrators to demonstrate care for students? What would you tell them?
5) To what extent do you know about your teacher(s) experiences and life outside of school?
6) Do you think your teacher cares about the material in the class? How do you know?
7) Let's talk about your favorite class. In general, what kinds of things do you learn and what type of activities do you engage in this class?
8) How do you express your understanding of the content in class (presentations, group learning experience, etc?
9) Is there anything I have not asked you that you would like to share?

APPENDIX F
Coding Scheme

Appendix F
Coding Scheme

Step 2 – Develop Initial Codes

Initial Codes

- Keep me in class
- Help me academically
- Encouragement/redirection
- Body language
- respect
- modeling
- dialogue
- practice
- confirmation
- Genuine/honest/helpful
- Shaming/fear/punitive
- accountability
- motivation
- Social relations
- Conceptions of self and other
- Conceptions of knowledge
- Talk to me

Step 3 – Search for Themes
Step 4 – Review and Refine themes

Initial Themes	Final Themes
Encouragement/Redirection	Redirection and Encouragement
Facilitate class attendance	Willingness to Provide Help
Help	Provision of Support by Teachers
support	Opportunities for Increased Support by Teachers
Lack of support	Teachers Speaking to Students
Teacher talk	Teacher's Disposition
Teacher behavior	Teacher's Expectations
High and low expectations	Building Relationships
Relationships	Relating Content to Life
Relevant Content	

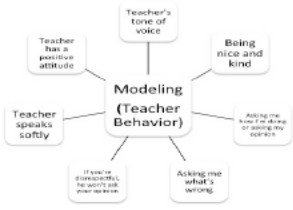
Step 3a- Create mind maps

Step 3a- Create mind maps

Step 3a- Create mind maps

Step 3a- Create mind maps

Step 3a- Create mind maps



- Find connections across themes
- Combine if possible to reduce redundancy

Step 4 – Define and Name Themes

Theme 1: Redirection and Encouragement – The teacher's redirection had more to do with the student's disposition towards class and encouragement to attend class.
Theme 2: Willingness to Provide Help – Academic help provided by the teacher was seen as an indicator of care especially one to one help.
Theme 3: Provision of Support by Teachers – The teacher's ability to support students educationally as indicated by providing motivation to participate in class and show effort. This differs from willingness to provide help because this was not specific to academics but more to the schooling experience.
Theme 4: Opportunities for Increased Support by Teachers – Teachers who made demeaning comments, employed punitive practices/strategies, called students out in front of peers were perceived as lacking in support.
Theme 5: Teacher's Speaking to Students – The interaction that the teacher had with students was vital and was an indicator of dialogue. Students perceived that the teachers understood them and didn't focus on the behavior. Teachers were specifically speaking to students based on student initiation of conversation.
Theme 6: Teacher's Disposition – The students perceived the importance of the teacher's attitude, tone of voice, and common courtesy in caring.
Theme 7: Teacher's expectations – Included both high and low expectations held by teachers.
Theme 8: Building Relationships – Although there were elements of building relationships in many of the themes, relationships here indicate connection between teacher and student.
Theme 9: - Relating Content to Life – Evidence of the culturally relevant practices employed by the teachers.

APPENDIX G
Professional Development Module

Appendix G

Professional Development Module

Schools as Centers of Care

Presented by Didi Watts
Vice President of Education
Vista Del Mar Child and Family Services
May 4, 2018

The Problem

Purpose and Outcome of this module

The purpose of this professional development module is to:

- Understand the data as it relates to African American male students with special needs in non-public schools.
- Discuss how schools can become centers of care to better support students in returning to their schools of residence.
- Reflect on their personal practices and how it might change as a result of the data.

- Every child is one caring adult away from changing their life trajectory.
- You may be that adult!

Caring and Social Justice

- Caring within a structure plagued by inequality takes multiple forms, and at some moments when we think we are caring for students of color we actually are harming them because we are failing to counter a social structure that treats them unequally". - Sonia Nieto (2008, p. 1)

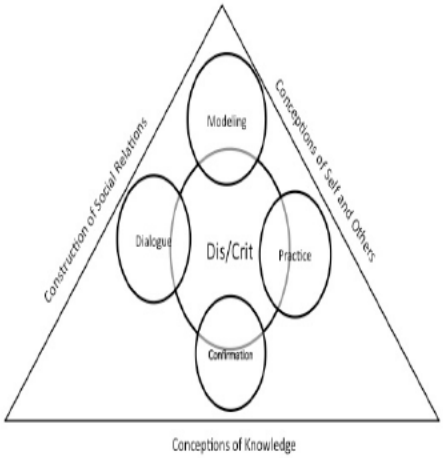
Students have to know you care, before they care how much you know.

Research on the Problem

- Historically, teachers have not been successful serving African American male students with or without special needs.(Noguera, 2003; Howard, 2008; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015)
- When African American male students are found eligible for special education services, they are more likely to be educated in settings that segregate them from their White peers.(Fierros & Conroy, 2002)
- If students do not perceive that the teacher cares for them, it may be more difficult for a teacher to be successful engaging the student in the learning experience. (Polite, 1994; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015)
- The maintenance and enhancement of **caring** is missing from our educational institutions.(Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984, 2001, 2005)

What have the students said about caring?

- In previous studies, students have said:
  - They want to be cared for and wanted to demonstrate care
  - Care by the teacher led to positive outcomes
- The research also says:
  - A family atmosphere within the school helped to establish care as a core value in the school.



The Current Study

DisCrit (Conner, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016); Ethic of Care (Gilligan, 1982, Noddings, 1984); Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995)

What do you mean by care?

- The definition of caring varies depending upon who is providing the definition. For this training we will use the following definition by Noddings (2005).
- ***Caring -*** a connection or encounter between two human beings.

Every Child Needs a Champion

Models of Care in Schools

- Noddings (2005), identifies four necessary components as a model of caring in schools.
- Modeling- supervisor to staff; staff to staff; adult to student – explain why
- Dialogue- engaging in discussion and collectively arriving at a decision – seek solutions together
- Practice- opportunities to show caring for others
- Confirmation- showing students a lovelier image than that manifested in his/her present acts

Modeling

- Modeling requires that we show our students how to care by creating caring relations with them.
- Modeling requires the teacher/adult to explain what is being done and why when it comes to the student teacher interaction.

- "Without a sense of caring, there is no sense of community"
  - Anthony J. D'Angelo

Dialogue

- Dialogue is open ended. It gives the carer (teacher) and the cared-for (student) an opportunity to engage in dialogue and make a determination together.
- Dialogue involves the genuine engagement of the other. It is entered into by both parties without one person having an answer already in mind

Classroom-Reflective Texts and Nonjudgmental Dialogue

The Perspectives curriculum supports conversations about students' identities and community experiences.

Practice

- Practice requires opportunities for students to gain experience in caregiving.
- Practice is designed to teach specific skills and support the development of certain attitudes and ways of looking at the world

Confirmation

- When we confirm, we spot a better self and encourage its development.
- If the student makes a decision that is not helpful, the teacher does not act as if it did not happen but rather through caring, shares with the student another picture of himself

Train your mind to see the good in everything

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Educators implement the following 3 suppositions :

Conceptions of Self and Others

- Teachers believe all students are capable of academic success
- Teaching is seen as a way to give back to the community
- Teachers believe in the Freirian notion of pulling out knowledge
- Teachers are part of the community

The Manner in which Social Relations are Constructed

- Teachers maintain fluid teacher student relationships
- Teachers demonstrated connectedness with the students
- Teachers developed a community of learners
- Teachers encouraged collaboration between students and

Conceptions of Knowledge

- Teachers believe that knowledge is not static but it is shared, recycled, and constructed
- Teachers scaffold to facilitate learning
- Students are provided with multiple opportunities through various methods to show mastery of content

Ladson-Billings, 1995

CRP is a theoretical model that addresses student achievement and helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities.

9 Themes Emerged from the Study

Theme 1:
Redirection and Encouragement
Students need to feel cared for through positive reinforcement and praise

Theme 2:
Willingness to Provide Help
Students expect that a teacher who cares would be willing to help academically and otherwise.

Theme 3:
Provision of Support by Teachers
Students expect teachers to hold them accountable despite their disabilities.

Theme 4:
Opportunities for Increased Support by Teachers
Students believed that teachers who exhibited shaming or punitive behaviors were not caring

Theme 5:
Teachers Speaking to Students
Students believed that caring teachers to speak with them inside and outside of class regarding academic or behavior.

Theme 6:
Teacher's Disposition
Students felt that the teacher's tone of voice and ability to demonstrate care had a positive effect on their interactions with others

Theme 7:
Teachers' Expectations
Students felt that caring teachers held them to high expectations regarding academic performance.

Theme 8:
Building Relationships
Students expected caring teachers to respond to their needs individually rather than solely focusing on the group.

Theme 9:
Relating Content to Life
Students believed that teachers who care are able to relate the classroom content to their life.

What does that mean for me?

How do I care for the hard to care for?

Implications for Practice - Administrators

1. Utilize the components of care in teacher observations (formal and informal)
2. Incorporate opportunities for teacher candidates to show the ability to care for all students during the interview process
3. Provide professional development regarding the need to integrate both discipline and care.

"Caring is important in working with students with behavioral challenges but it is often neglected because of the need to maintain control in the classroom"
- Morse

Implications for Practice - Teachers

1) Willingly and actively participate in professional development

Curricular Implications –

2) Re-evaluate the curriculum

- Not only the materials we use but how we present the information and assess for mastery
- Project based learning opportunities where students utilize their creativity
- Offer multiple ways of showing mastery – presentations, integration of art etc.
- Create opportunities for students to construct knowledge together rather than a focus on individuality

Implications for Schools

1) Create opportunities for students to practice demonstrating care for others.

2) Be intentional about community service opportunities

- Community service requirement for graduation
- Infuse community service into the curriculum for each grade level

• 3) Empower to advocate

- Be intentional about explaining eligibilities for the purpose of empowering students to advocate for the accommodations they need

What steps will you take next?

- Formal Classroom meetings – involving the entire team
- Presenting cases during professional development time
- Choose a student that you may have difficulty interacting with and actively work to better that relationship (choose someone to hold you accountable)
- Specialized Support Program

You can be a champion. It all starts with you!

How will you start?

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