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Michelle Trotman Scott  
*Guest Editor*

## Strategies, Interventions, and Services for Culturally Responsive Special Education: Putting Theory Into Practice



Ralph Gardner III  
*Guest Editor*

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The Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL) - formerly the E-Journal of Teaching and Learning in Diverse Settings, is a scholarly, triple-blind, peer reviewed, open access electronic refereed journal that is published three times each year by the College of Education at Southern University - Baton Rouge. Publication occurs in the Spring, Summer, and Fall.

The IJTL is designed to provide opportunities for divergent ideas, views, and opinions on various topics and issues from professionals in diverse disciplines and professional arenas. It strives to be highly interdisciplinary in content that is likely to be of interest to teachers, principals, other school administrators, policymakers, graduate and undergraduate students, researchers, and academicians.

Manuscripts that focus on special education, general education (including subject content areas), bilingual education, cultural and linguistic diversity, innovative methods in teaching, assessment, exemplary programs, technology (assistive and instructional), educational leadership and reform, public policy, current issues and practices, and research relevant to education are encouraged.

Manuscripts submitted to the IJTL should be interesting, thorough, innovative, informative, well-documented, and have practical value that embraces and contributes to effective teaching and learning.

## Call for Manuscripts

The Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL) welcomes submissions that contribute to effective teaching and learning. It provides a forum for the dissemination of articles focused on a wide variety of topics and content subject areas.

The IJTL is comprised of four departments -- Feature Articles, Educational Tweets, Online Resources, and the Event Zone.

**Feature Articles** provide scholarly articles on important topics, theoretical perspectives, current issues, practices, strategies, and research related to teaching and learning in PK-12 and higher education settings. All manuscripts submitted to this department undergo a triple-blind peer review.

Manuscripts for feature articles may be submitted by faculty, graduate students (whose work is co-authored by faculty), school administrators, policymakers, researchers, classroom teachers, and other practicing educators on current and compelling educational topics, issues, practices, and concerns at all levels (PK-12 and higher education) from a wide range of disciplines.

Manuscripts that focus on special education, general education, bilingual education, cultural and linguistic diversity, innovative methods in teaching, assessment, exemplary programs, technology (assistive and instructional), educational leadership and reform, public policy, current

practices and issues, and research relevant to education are encouraged. The manuscripts should be interesting, informative, well documented, appeal to the IJTL diverse audience, and have practical value that embrace and contribute to effective teaching and learning.

Additionally, the manuscripts should be original, well written, and offer new knowledge or a new and insightful synthesis of existing knowledge that has significance or importance to education. They should also have a solid theoretical base and offer an appropriate blend of teaching and practice. The conclusion, summary, final thoughts, or implications should be supported by the evidence presented.

The complete review process for manuscripts submitted to this department may take up to three months. The author guidelines provide additional information on what you should know about the submission process.

**Educational Tweets** features brief informative tidbits, views, and opinions on hot topics, current events/issues, educational policies, interesting readings, and other areas that impact education or inform teaching and learning. The information, views, and opinions tweeted in this department reflect those of the author.

Papers submitted to Educational Tweets are limited to 350 words and are generally solicited by the section editors. Persons interested in submitting a paper should make an inquiry. Include in the subject line "Educational Tweets".

**Online Resources** highlight Internet Websites that provide information on instructional resources for PK-12 classroom and preservice teachers as well as resources that may be of interest to school administrators and teacher education faculty in higher education. Resources featured in this department are generated by the section editors.

**The Event Zone** features educational events such as conferences, meetings, workshops, forums, professional development opportunities, and webinars sponsored by various agencies and organizations that embrace effective teaching and learning. Events featured in this department are generated by the section editors.

<b>Submission Deadlines</b>		
<b>Spring 2015 (March/April)</b>	<b>Summer 2015 (July/August)</b>	<b>Fall 2015 (October/November)</b>
Manuscript Deadline November 15, 2014	Manuscript Deadline February 15, 2015	Manuscript Deadline May 15, 2015

## Author Guidelines

The Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL) is a scholarly, triple-blind, peer reviewed, open access electronic refereed journal that welcomes manuscripts from scholars, academicians, teachers, researchers, graduate students (whose work is co-authored by faculty), administrators, practitioners, and policymakers on a variety of topics and content areas as well as educational issues, evidence-based practices, and topics of educational significance.

Manuscripts submitted must be an original contribution that has not been previously published (in whole or substantial part), or is being concurrently considered for publication by another publisher. A cover letter stating these conditions should accompany the submission.

Manuscripts must be submitted electronically using word processing software. Acceptable formats include Microsoft Word (doc /docx) and Rich Text format (rtf).

Manuscripts should be formatted for printing on standard 8 x 11 inch paper with 1-inch margins, double spaced (including quotations and references), and prepared in Times New Roman 12-point font size. Titles, headings, and subheadings should be in upper and lower case fonts.

Manuscripts should not exceed 25 pages in length, including the title page, abstract, references, and tables or figures.

A separate cover sheet should provide the author's full name, organization or institutional affiliation, mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address; and the corresponding author should be identified. The author's name should not appear on any other pages of the manuscript. It is the responsibility of the corresponding author to notify the corresponding editor of the IJTL of changes in address, organization, or institutional affiliation occurring during the review process.

An abstract (100 - 150 words) should be included that summarizes the content of the manuscript. Five or six key words should be placed below the abstract.

Tables and figures should be placed in a separate file, and need not be double-spaced. Tables should only be used when appropriate and should include only essential data. Figures should be camera ready. Indicate the location for tables and figures in the text in boldface, enclosed in brackets, on a separate line.

The author is responsible for the accuracy and completeness of all references. References should be double-spaced and follow the specifications of the 6th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. The author is also responsible for obtaining permission to use copyrighted material, if required.

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Submit completed manuscripts or inquiries to the editor at [coeijtl@subr.edu](mailto:coeijtl@subr.edu). The IJTL is published by the College of Education under the auspices of the Executive Editor, Vera I. Daniels, Southern University and A & M College, P. O. Box 11298, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70813. Telephone/Fax (225) 771-5810.

## Review Process

Manuscripts submitted to the IJTL undergo a triple-blind peer review. All identifying information about the author is removed to ensure that the author's identity is not revealed.

Manuscripts received will be screened by the journal editors for conformity to the editorial guidelines, appropriateness of topic, and appropriateness for the journal readership. Manuscripts will also be assessed for content, relevance, accuracy, and usefulness to those in educational settings and stakeholders with an interest in educational policies and issues.

Appropriate manuscripts will be sent to peer reviewers. Poorly written or incorrectly formatted manuscripts will not be sent out for peer review.

All manuscripts received by the IJTL are assigned an identification number that is used to track the manuscript during the review process.

Within two weeks of receipt of the manuscript, an e-mail acknowledging receipt of the manuscript with notification of the assigned identification number will be sent to the author. The author may contact the journal corresponding editor at any time during the review process to obtain information about the status of their manuscript. Include in the subject line "Request for Manuscript Status Update (Manuscript # \_\_\_\_)."

The manuscript review process is generally completed within three months. This process may be slightly longer during major academic breaks or holidays.

Peer reviewers make one of the following decisions concerning a manuscript: (a) accept for publication (b) accept for publication and request minor revisions, (c) consider for publication after major revisions with the stipulation for a second peer review, (d) reject with resubmission invited, or (e) reject and decline the opportunity to publish.

Authors of manuscripts that have been accepted for publication will be notified by e-mail through the corresponding author. In some instances, authors may be asked to make revisions and provide a final copy of the manuscript before it is forwarded for publication.

Manuscripts accepted for publication may be susceptible to further editing to improve the quality and readability of the manuscript without materially changing the meaning of the text. Before publication, the corresponding author will receive an edited copy of the manuscript to approve its content and answer any questions that may arise from the editing process.

The IJTL is always looking for peer reviewers to serve on its Board of Reviewers. If you are interested in being considered as a peer reviewer, click on the link [Peer Reviewer](#) to obtain an application. Please return the application by e-mail ([coeijtl@subr.edu](mailto:coeijtl@subr.edu)) or fax (225-771-5810).

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## Guest Editors' Introduction

### **Strategies, Interventions, and Services for Culturally Responsive Special Education: Putting Theory into Practice**

*Michelle Trotman Scott and Ralph Gardner III*

This issue of the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning* focuses on minority students' disproportionate placement in special education, which is most evident in mild disability categories that do not require physiological evidence of a disability. The continuing challenge of disproportionality is an on-going concern especially as the school-age population becomes increasingly diverse.

In this issue the authors highlight the challenges and make recommendations for solutions in relation to disproportionality. They also emphasize the need for educators to identify and implement strategies that are empirically valid and culturally sensitive. To successfully instruct all students, educators need knowledge of effective pedagogy, the ability to differentiate between a cultural difference and a disability, and the ability to collaborate with individuals in the schools and communities they serve.

An important part of developing cultural sensitivity involves understanding the history of American education from the perspective of minorities. Trotman Scott and Moss-Bouldin discuss the rich history of African American culture and how individuals from the dominant culture often misinterpret the behaviors of African American students. Using the scholarly works of Zora Neale Hurston, A. Wade Boykin, and Donna Y. Ford, these authors analyze the characteristics of African American students. Their analysis highlights how culturally appropriate behavior by African American students may be misinterpreted as deficit behaviors by teachers who lack awareness of African American culture. The authors recommend the performing arts as a strategy to tap into the creativity of African American students and they encourage teachers to offer activities that engage African American students in the performing arts to match with their characteristic of movement.

In the Gardner, Rizzi, and Council article, the history of disproportionality is examined as well as the legislative initiatives to address disproportionality. This article focuses on the challenges and solutions for educating minority males in American schools. The authors address the issues of discrimination and effective pedagogy, and they examine both the impact and intent of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the No Child Left Behind Act in relation to minority males. Gardner and colleagues also present strategies for improving the outcomes of minority males that can be implemented in schools. These authors feel that the current status of minority males can be improved with the collective efforts of all stakeholders, including education administrators, teacher trainers, teachers, parents/guardians, and students.

In "School Discipline Disproportionality: Culturally Competent Interventions for African American Males," Simmons-Reed and Cartledge discuss the widespread use of exclusionary

policies in the schools despite the poor outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students. This article focuses on the plight of African American males with and without disabilities, zero tolerance policies and the assumption underlying these policies, and the negative effects that zero tolerance policies have on students in special and general education setting. The authors also discuss culturally responsive behavioral and academic interventions along with possible outcomes.

In the article, “Towards Culturally Responsive and Integrated Instruction for All Learners: The Integrated Learning Model,” Cramer, Pellegrini-Lafont, and Gonzalez present and explore the benefits of a culturally responsive, integrated learning model that includes social-class sensitive pedagogy to promote access, equity, and culturally supported experiences for African American and Hispanic students. This model focuses on the strength-base perspective of students.

Mayes, Hines, and Harris present qualitative data from African American students identified as twice-exceptional and being served in K-12 schools located in a Midwestern urban setting. Four major themes emerged from the data and are discussed. Recommendations for school counselors are also presented.

Minority students are overrepresented in special education at alarming rates. Some of these students are misunderstood, misdiagnosed, and mis-educated due to classrooms being filled with teachers who are not culturally competent and who do not use culturally responsive instructional practices. Collectively, we believe that you will find the information presented in this issue both timely and relevant.

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*Michelle Trotman Scott, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Special Education in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the University of West Georgia. Ralph Gardner III, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Special Education at The Ohio State University.*

# **We Need More Drama: A Comparison of Ford, Hurston, and Boykin's African American Characteristics and Instructional Strategies for the Culturally Different Classroom**

**Michelle Trotman Scott**  
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*The scholar, rhetorician, or historian who undertakes an analysis of the African American past without recognizing the important role that orature has played and continues to play in the lives of African Americans is treading on intellectual quicksand.*

-- Molefi Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*

Teachers who are not considered to be culturally competent may misinterpret many characteristics exhibited by African American students. They may be unaware of the African American linguistic practices and characteristics and they may also be unfamiliar with research conducted by scholars such as Zora Neale Hurston and A. Wade Boykin. This lack of knowledge may cause teachers to wrongly view the behaviors and/or learning styles of African American students in negative ways. These misunderstandings could inadvertently affect the way in which some teachers perceive and interact with these students. This article extends the comparison of Boykin's African American characteristics of ADHD and includes Hurston's characteristics of Negro expression and Ford's application of Boykin's characteristics to the characteristics of African American students. Through these comparisons, the authors suggest that the performing arts not only be used as a vehicle of expression for African American students in multiple settings (i.e., school and community) but also as a tool to empower African American students with and without high incidence disabilities.

*Keywords:* African American students, Black students, high incidence disabilities, ADHD, performing arts, drama, Ford, Hurston, Boykin

When African American children participate in settings that heavily cater to, and are designed for, children from the dominant culture, they are often culturally misunderstood (Ford, 2013; Hill, 2009). Teachers may mistakenly view culturally specific behavior as problem behavior or evidence of inferiority, thus resulting in negative experiences for African American students (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Frazier Trotman, 2002). This negative perception is a consequence of many in the dominant culture not viewing African American culture as one that thrives academically (Grantham, Trotman Scott, & Harmon, 2012; Ford, 2013; Landson-Billings, 2007).

Teachers with predetermined negative attitudes or deficit thought processes overlook the beauty and strength of African American culture and how it can be used to enhance the education experience of all students. While the misunderstanding of African American culture and the subsequent misinterpretation of African American children's behavior are not new, they are persistent concerns in our schools and society (Ford, et al, 2002; Valencia, 2010). In 1934, Zora Neale Hurston discussed African American culture at length in her classic essay *Characteristics of Negro Expression*, which was eventually published in 1997 (Hurston, 1997).

### The Plot Thickens: Zora Neale Hurston and the Linguistic Practices of African Americans

Born in the late nineteenth century, Zora Neale Hurston was raised in Eatonville, Florida, the first incorporated town in the United States with an all African-American population. This unique community served as a catalyst for her future research and writings. Hurston was immersed in Black culture. She received her associate degree from Howard University, a historically Black college and went on to become the first African American student at Barnard College to earn a bachelor's degree. It was at Barnard that Hurston learned the effects of anthropology and its impact on racial discourse, and that each culture had its own importance according to its specific expectation (Kaplan, 2003). Hurston was devoted in her research on African American folk traditions as a mechanism to show the beauty and worth of the culture. She became one of the most influential, controversial, and well-known African-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance. Her essay, *Characteristics of Negro Expression*, was based on her folklore research and it serves as a blueprint for current African-American cultural and artistic expression (Watts, 2006).

Hurston believed that community encompassed more than a physical home—it represented where our identities were developed. Hurston's research was motivated and inspired by African-American ethos (i.e., the cultural behaviors) that existed within her own African-American community. She found value in collecting folklore in the Eatonville community and understood that folklore was a product of community. Her experiences and research lead to the identification of the characteristics of Negro expression (i.e., drama, will to adorn, angularity, asymmetry, dancing, Negro folklore, culture heroes, originality, imitation, the jook, and dialect), all of which constellated around understanding the nature of an African-American community (Hurston, 1997). Despite Hurston's work, African American culture has not always been valued by the dominate culture thereby placing African Americans at risk for being misunderstood when they are required to enter systems (e.g., schools) that are designed for members of the dominate culture.

Let the Dialogue Begin:

#### *Teacher Cultural Competence and Its Implications for School Behavior*

As previously stated, a lack of cultural competence and understanding can lead to misinterpretations of diverse students' behaviors within the academic setting, which is generally the case for African American students. There are many instances in which school environments require students to exhibit certain social and academic behaviors in order to meet specific goals.

These behaviors are listed in student handbooks across the country. And, throughout the school year, many teachers reiterate and reinforce these expectations to their students. In an effort to ensure that students meet certain expectations, many schools require parents/guardians to provide a written signature indicating that they understand that their child should follow the policies as stated in the handbook, or a consequence will ensue.

The way people behave, interact, and respond is greatly influenced by the rules and expectations of the culture of which they are accustomed. As such, both teachers' and students' perspectives are guided by their respective cultures. If teachers are not familiar with the norms of their students' culture, they may misjudge students' intentions. Behaviors exhibited by students that are viewed in a deficit manner by teachers will conflict with the expectations of the traditional academic environment (Ford & Trotman Scott, 2013), but behaviors exhibited by African Americans may be unique characteristics of their culture (Hurston, 1997). Furthermore, African-Americans exhibit certain cultural styles that are developed and nurtured within a specific familial and communal context (Boykin, 1994, 2011).

For over two decades, A. Wade Boykin has been prolific in conducting research on the cultural styles of African Americans. Afrocentric cultural styles identified by Boykin in 1994 and further examined in 2011 include: spirituality, harmony, movement, verve, affect, communalism, oral tradition, expressive individualism, and social time perspective. These characteristics are common in African American students and are often exhibited, accepted, and fostered within the African American community/home setting. But, when culturally different individuals are placed in situations different from what they are accustomed (i.e., monocultural school settings and expectations), they may have difficulty making the necessary social and cultural adjustments to be successful (e.g., Boykin, 1994, 2011). Schools are one setting where these cultural styles may be misunderstood, and in some instances, contribute to higher referrals to special education and subsequent overrepresentation (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2008).

Ford (1996, 2011) applied Boykin's cultural styles to the characteristics of gifted students to create characteristics of African American [Black] gifted students. Although Ford's application focused on the gifts and talents of African American students (1996, 2011), the same characteristics can be used to generally describe all African American students.

Using Hurston's (1934) characteristics of Negro expression, the authors compared Hurston's essay on *Characteristics of Negro Expression* to the characteristics and behaviors of Boykin's (1994, 2011) Afrocentric cultural styles and Ford's (1996, 2011) application of Boykin's Afrocentric cultural styles to gifted African American students (see Table 1). For the purpose of this article, we focused on a characteristic that Hurston described as indicative of African American artistic expression—drama, and found that many of the descriptions of African-American students were also identifiable within Hurston's *Characteristics of Negro Expression*.

Unfortunately, when African American students are viewed through a deficit lens, teachers assume the worst and they rely on limited understanding and stereotypes (Ford et al., 2002), which may in turn lead to a special education referral (Trotman Scott, 2014).

**TABLE 1**

**Ford's Characteristics of Black (African American) Students, Hurston's Characteristics of Negroes, and Boykin's Afrocentric Cultural Styles**

Ford's (Gifted) Black Student Characteristics	Hurston's Characteristics of Negro Expression	Boykin's Afrocentric Cultural Styles
Chooses not to study because of their belief in God's will (i.e., if God wants me to pass, I will pass. If not, failing must have been God's will).	<b>Originality:</b> The use of words to create something or to give it meaning. Every word has a purpose and a consequence. The exchange and re-exchange of ideas between groups.	<b>Spirituality:</b> Life's happenings are not automatic; religious and higher forces influence people's everyday lives and permeates all of life's affairs
Simultaneously working and/or singing/humming a tune	<b>Asymmetry:</b> The presence of rhythm is in frequent and unexpected segments.	<b>Harmony:</b> May maintain a high sensitivity to rhythm and harmony due to one's functioning being tightly linked to nature's order
Prefer kinesthetic (hands-on) learning styles as well as possess psychomotor intelligence	<b>Angularity:</b> Avoiding a straight line.  <b>Dance:</b> Dynamic suggestion	<b>Movement:</b> May have a desire to move or be physically engaged which emphasizes the interweaving of movement, rhythm, music and dance.
Lively and energetic interactions with peers and teachers.	<b>Drama:</b> Everything is acted out; words are action words and the interpretation of languages in terms of pictures.	<b>Verve:</b> Tend to display a high level of energy and enjoy action that is energetic and lively.
Have a tendency to know when one does not particularly care for them and may react in an emotional way that may be deemed inappropriate.	<b>Drama:</b> Everything is acted out; words are action words and the interpretation of languages in terms of pictures.	<b>Affect:</b> Often sensitive to emotional cues and feelings.
Have a need for affiliation and social acceptance/approval; because of this, their communal connections and conscientiousness surpass their individual privileges.	<b>Absence of the concept of privacy:</b> Communal life based on no privacy.	<b>Communalism:</b> A strong commitment to social connectedness.
Enjoy the use of elaborate and exaggerated language, storytelling and telling jokes. The direct, blunt, and metaphorically colorful use of language both spoken and auditory is treated as a performance.	<b>Dialect:</b> Self-expression in language.  <b>Negro Folklore:</b> Demonstrates adaptability.  <b>Will to Adorn:</b> Use of metaphor and simile and embellishment of language.	<b>Oral Tradition:</b> Prefer oral modes of communication.
Colorful use of language (metaphors, clichés, and idioms) and dress; display of creativity and risk taking.	<b>Imitation:</b> Modification of ideas.	<b>Expressive Individualism:</b> Seek and develop distinctive personalities that denote a uniqueness of personal style.
Treat time as a social phenomenon_ there is no beginning or end; may miss deadlines.	<b>Asymmetry:</b> The presence of rhythm is in frequent and unexpected segments.	<b>Social Time Perspective:</b> Emphasize what is occurring at the present...the here and now. The event is more important than the time and the future.

*Note:* Ford's characteristics of gifted African American [Black] students are being applied to African American students in general.

Few educators are familiar with Boykin's Afrocentric cultural styles; even fewer are familiar with the cultural styles of African American students (Trotman Scott & Ford, 2013). They are, however, familiar with the characteristics of ADHD and may assume that students who often squirm in their seat, are fidgety or can't be still, stand or roam when they are required to remain seated, appear to be restless, have difficulty quietly engaging in leisure activities, seem to often to be "on the go" or acts as if "driven by a motor", and talks excessively, are students with hyperactive ADHD. On the other hand, children who are considered impulsive often call out answers before a question is completed, have difficulty waiting their turn, and/or interrupt or intrude on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games) (American Psychiatric Association, APA, 2000).

Some characteristics of ADHD are similar to characteristics of African American students as identified by Ford's (1996, 2011) application of Boykin's characteristics. Regrettably, if African American students are viewed in a deficit manner, behaviors that are typical of their culture will appear to conflict within the traditional academic environment (Ford & Trotman, 2001). Conflicts must be resolved and in the case of African American students, the resolution lies within academic failure, special education referrals, and in some cases, suspension. Unfortunately, a lack of cultural competence, coupled with deficit thinking may lead to student failure, unnecessary special education referrals, and/or a constant push for African American students to assimilate to the dominate culture via monocultural traditional academic expectations (Spradlin, 2011).

Increasing the number of culturally competent teachers within the teaching force may reduce the occurrence of mislabeling that can lead to the overrepresentation of African American students in special education (Cartledge & Dukes, 2009; Cartledge et al., 2008). Teachers who lack cultural competence are not aware of beliefs and practices that occur within the cultural settings, out of which their students come. Their lack of awareness may cause them to easily mistake the behaviors of African American students for that of disrespect, insubordination, and/or lack of knowledge. This can also be applied to their belief that African American students may have a disability simply because students' cultural and academic beliefs differ from that of the dominant culture (Trotman Scott, 2014; Trotman Scott & Ford, 2013). A culturally competent teacher can discern cultural characteristics from disability characteristics. They are also able to identify teaching strategies that are culturally responsive and complimentary to the strengths of their students. The performing arts can be used as one of these strategies.

The Setting:

### *Using Performing Arts as a Culturally Responsive Teaching Strategy*

Knowledge about the characteristics of ADHD is more common among teachers than the characteristics of African Americans as described by Boykin. Many teachers are likely to discuss a 'trip to the pediatrician' for an ADHD screening with parents before providing a recommendation for other strategies that can be used to accommodate students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Trotman Scott, 2014). For example, very few teachers consider the performing arts as a strategy to positively incorporate students' need for movement. Some African American students do not need a special education label. Instead, these students need a culturally competent teacher who is able to understand the context of their students' behavior and

capable of identifying and implementing school-based strategies that utilize “high energy” behaviors in positive activities.

The authors believe that the characteristics seen as areas of weakness within the classroom setting serve as strengths in theatre and the performing arts. More specifically, drama can be used as both a learning and enrichment tool for many African American students who exhibit the characteristics described by Hurston (1934), Boykin (1994, 2001), and Ford (1996, 2011).

The Cast:

### *Black Actors with High-Incidence Disabilities*

Several African American actors with a disability attribute acting to their ability to cope and succeed. Will Smith, an African American rapper, actor, and producer with ADHD and dyslexia has discussed how he used his learning disability as an asset for acting by taking very little downtime and working non-stop (“Dyslexia and Will Smith”, n.d.). He also learned to use characteristics of his learning disability as an asset by finding and analyzing patterns in his acting, something he attributes to his dyslexia.

Whoopi Goldberg was diagnosed with dyslexia as an adult. Goldberg utilized her ambition, passion, and talent to help her succeed. She disclosed that those who called her dumb and stupid when she was younger, motivated her success as an actress. Acting gave her the tools to prove naysayers wrong. Goldberg was able to replace her feelings of inadequacy as a student with adequacy on stage and in front of a camera. In other words, she was able to find success. Despite being labeled with a disability, the Oscar award-winning actress became a part of an elite group of only ten actors who have won an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony Award. She was also the first woman to be honored with the prestigious Mark Twain Prize for American Humor (“Whoopi Goldberg, Comedian and Award-winning Actress”, n.d.).

What if Will Smith and Whoopi Goldberg had a culturally competent teacher who saw and understood their expressive energy and referred them to the performing arts rather than special education? Both are gifted performers, yet their school behaviors were more often viewed from a deficit perspective.

The act of performing can also motivate people to overcome difficulties. Actor James Earl Jones’ disability manifested itself in stuttering. As a young student, a teacher helped him conquer his fear of speaking in front of others through the performance of poetry (Hartley, 2010). His teacher did not focus on his deficits, but instead utilized a strategy that helped him overcome his fear while strengthening his area of weakness. Jones went on to study drama at the University of Michigan and is most known for his voiceover work in movies like Star Wars and the Lion King. In essence, drama, performance, and public speaking helped Jones overcome his fear of public speaking due to stuttering.

Award winning actor Samuel L. Jackson also had a debilitating speech impediment as a child. However, he began acting at the urging of his speech therapist and was able to gain theatrical success and esteem (Anonymous, 2012).



## The Production:

### *Bringing it All Together*

As stated earlier, theatre can serve as a useful tool for some African American students whose behaviors may be misinterpreted as those of ADHD and other high-incidence disabilities. When the authors examined the characteristics of students with ADHD, it was determined that Hurston's (1981) characteristics and Boykin's (1994, 2011) Afrocentric cultural styles closely resembled the characteristics of African American students (i.e., Ford, 1996, 2011). When engaged in drama, actors use action words/language that allowed the audience to interpret words and form pictures (Hurston, 1997). Students are often very talkative and prefer to speak rather than write. Some are also emotional and sensitive.

Although teachers may recognize characteristics of ADHD, most may not be familiar with the characteristics of African American students. Teachers who lack cultural competence may focus on the negative traits of students and look at them through a deficit lens. Negative thoughts about a student can lead to low expectations and negative academic outcomes, especially if students are not given the opportunity to utilize additional and/or alternative activities to display their strengths.

However, teachers familiar with the characteristics of African American students may utilize dramatization within the classroom as a means of providing students with the opportunity to capitalize on their strengths. Culturally competent teachers may also suggest drama and/or theater as an outlet for providing students with opportunities to overcome, e.g., fear, anxiety, embarrassment, low self esteem, inadequacy. Table 2 displays a comparison of ADHD characteristics and Ford's (1996, 2011) African American student characteristics with Boykin (1994, 2011) and Hurston (1981) identifiers and academic implications when viewed within a deficit lens.

### Act 1: Culturally Responsive Strategies for African Americans Students with Flips to the Script

**Scene 1, Strategy 1.** Evaluation of students orally and/or through simulations and skits to enrich their learning experiences and address cultural needs.

Many African American students prefer hands on strategies (Ford, 1996, 2011), and there are several that appeal to African American students with ADHD. Teachers need to consider and implement alternative assessment modalities to measure the learning of African American students with high incidence disabilities. Allowing students to act, dance, sing, rap, or produce a visual piece would not only enrich their learning experience but also meet many of Hurston's (1981) expression characteristics (i.e., angularity, dance, asymmetry, dialect, negro folklore, will to adorn, and originality) and Boykin's (1994, 2011) cultural styles (i.e., movement, harmony, verve, oral, and tradition)

**TABLE 2**

**Comparison of Ford/Hurston/Boykin’s Characteristics to ADHD Characteristics Through a Deficit Lens and Possible Academic Implications**

Ford/Hurston/Boykin	ADHD	Deficit Lens	Academic Implication
<p><b>F:</b> Prefer kinesthetic (hands-on) learning styles as well as possess psychomotor intelligence.</p> <p><b>H:</b> Angularity, Dance</p> <p><b>B:</b> Movement</p>	<p>Often runs about or climbs when and where it is not viewed as appropriate (adolescents or adults may feel very restless).</p> <p>Often fidgets with hands or feet, or squirms in seat.</p> <p>Often gets up from seat when remaining in seat is expected.</p>	<p>Chooses to teach in other modes of teaching and does not allow students to use the style of learning most comfortable.</p> <p>Students are considered to be over-excitabile, off-task and/or hyperactive</p>	<p>Student learning may be stifled → academic failure.</p>
<p><b>F:</b> Lively and energetic interactions with peers and teachers.</p> <p><b>H:</b> Drama</p> <p><b>B:</b> Verve</p>	<p>Is often “on the go” or often acts as if “driven by a motor.” Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games). Often has trouble waiting one’s turn.</p> <p>Often blurts out answers before questions have been finished.</p>	<p>Considers Black students loud and even obnoxious and rude, off-task, lazy and/or unmotivated when they remain unresponsive to lecture-typed teaching.</p>	<p>Forced to learn in a way considered boring → perpetual unresponsiveness → academic failure.</p>
<p><b>F:</b> Have a tendency to know when one does not particularly care for them and may react in an emotional way that may be deemed inappropriate.</p> <p><b>H:</b> Drama</p> <p><b>B:</b> Affect</p>	<p>Very emotional and sensitive.</p> <p>Impulsive.</p> <p>Immediate gratification, short-term goals.</p>	<p>May consider student’s response as insubordinate.</p>	<p>The child may be sent out of the classroom → may reiterate the students’ belief that the teacher dislikes them → reduced opportunities to learn → academic failure.</p>
<p><b>F:</b> Have a need for affiliation and social acceptance/approval and because of this their communal connections and conscientiousness surpass their individual privileges.</p> <p><b>H:</b> Absence of concept of privacy.</p> <p><b>B:</b> Community</p>	<p>Socially dependent and needy.</p> <p>Dislikes independent work. Prefers to work with others; prefers to help others.</p>	<p>May assume that the student is not capable of achieving independent of others.</p>	<p>Assumption → decreased opportunities for students to ‘show what they know’ → reduced likelihood of exposure to more rigorous curricula.</p>

*Note:* **F** = Ford, **H** = Hurston, **B** = Boykin

**TABLE 2** (continued)

Comparison of Ford/Hurston/Boykin's Characteristics to ADHD Characteristics Through a Deficit Lens and Possible Academic Implications

Ford/Hurston/Boykin	ADHD	Deficit Lens	Academic Implication
<p>F: Enjoy the use of elaborate and exaggerated language, storytelling and telling jokes. The direct, blunt and meta-phorically colorful use of language both spoken and auditory is treated as performance.</p> <p>H: Dialect, Negro Folklore, Will to Adorn</p> <p>B: Oral Tradition</p>	<p>Often talks excessively; talkative.</p> <p>Blunt, direct, forthright. Prefers to speak rather than write</p>	<p>May become frustrated with the joking and embellishments and may misinterpret it as a form disrespect or impoliteness.</p>	<p>Misinterpretation → student may be removed from the classroom → missed opportunities to learn → academic failure</p>
<p>Colorful use of language (metaphors, clichés, and idioms) and dress; display of creativity and risk taking.</p> <p>H: Imitation &amp; Originality</p> <p>B: Expressive Individualism</p>	<p>Expressive, demonstrative. Unique, clever, innovative in personal style.</p> <p>Creates own rules; resists following rules.</p> <p>Resourceful.</p>	<p>May consider students as impulsive, eccentric or as attention seekers.</p>	<p>Misinterpretation → student may feel ostracized from peers and teachers → may respond in an emotional manner → student may be removed from the classroom → missed opportunities to learn → academic failure</p>
<p>Treat time as a social phenomenon - there is no beginning or end; may miss deadlines.</p> <p>H: Asymmetry</p> <p>B: Social Time Perspective</p>	<p>Often forgetful in daily activities.</p> <p>Often does not give close attention to details; makes careless mistakes in school-work, work, or other activities.</p>	<p>Student doesn't care about deadlines and is not capable of turning assignments in on time.</p>	<p>Late assignments → points deducted → lower grades → academic failure</p>
<p>Chooses not to study because of their belief in God's will (i.e., if God wants me to pass, I will pass. If not, failing must have been God's will).</p> <p>H: Originality</p> <p>B: Spirituality</p>		<p>Lazy or the student possesses a low level of knowledge, especially if the student continuously fails.</p>	<p>The student may not master enough information to comprehend what is needed in the future → academic failure → possible special education referral.</p>
<p>Simultaneously working and/or singing/humming a tune.</p> <p>H: Asymmetry</p> <p>B: Harmony</p> <p>The noise is distracting to teachers and other classmates.</p>		<p>The noise is distracting to teachers and other classmates.</p>	<p>May cause conflict → child may be sent out of class → reduced number of learning opportunities → academic failure → possible special education referral</p>

Note: F = Ford, H = Hurston, B = Boykin

*Flip the Script* ~ The identifying characteristics of ADHD (e.g., often talks excessively, talkative; blunt, direct, forthright; prefers to speak rather than write; expressive, demonstrative; unique, clever, innovative in personal style; creates own rules; and resourceful) (APA, 2000), can be addressed and ‘down played’ using verbal and expressive strategies that allow African American students to be mobile and engage in hands on activities. This approach welcomes and displays many of the characteristics that can sometimes lead to a diagnosis of ADHD. In other words, for some African American students, these behaviors are necessary for a successful outcome and will no longer be seen as inappropriate.

**Scene 2, Strategy 2.** Provide frequent breaks during instruction and independent work to allow students to work in ‘chunks’ of time, as measured through the use of timers (Trotman Scott, 2014).

Some African American students treat time as a social phenomenon and do not consider time to have a beginning or an end. Considering time in this manner could cause them to miss deadlines (Ford, 2011). However, using kinesthetic and tactile strategies (i.e., experiments, projects, and games) could provide them with the ability to take frequent breaks and be mobile while also engaging in hand-on activities (Trotman Scott, 2014). Using these strategies can meet the needs of African American students with ADHD while meeting Hurston’s (1981) expression characteristic of asymmetry and Boykin’s (1994, 2011) cultural style of social time perspective. Chunking instruction also provides African American students with the ability to focus on a specified amount of material during a predetermined period of time, thereby decreasing the likelihood of them missing deadlines or forgetting what is needed to complete the assignment.

*Flip the Script* ~ Children with ADHD are forgetful when it comes to engaging in and completing daily activities. They often do not pay close attention to details and make careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other school activities. If children with ADHD are able to learn and work in small sections that will eventually make a whole, they will more than likely remain focused and not get lost in time. They will also be able to remain on task if the strategies used are designed to incorporate frequent breaks. When students know that a break is coming, they are more likely to remain committed to the task at hand.

**Scene 3, Strategy 3.** Incorporate cooperative activities to allow African American students with ADHD to tap into their area of communalism.

Many African American students possess a strong commitment to social connectedness and bonds. For example, they focus on making sure that their peers are okay and up to speed, and they do not only think of themselves. Instead, they may also want to help their friend, etc. who may be struggling with a concept that they have mastered. Occasionally, assigning activities that require students to work in groups will meet Hurston’s (1981) community characteristic and Boykin’s (1994, 2011) communalism cultural style.

*Flip the Script* ~ Students with ADHD are socially dependent and needy. They dislike independent work, prefer to work with others, and prefer to help others. Providing them with the opportunity to collaborate with peers fulfills their need for affiliation, social acceptance, and approval (Ford, 1996, 2011), as well as appease their strong commitment to social

connectedness. In so doing, they no longer feel as if they are unable to interact with their peers and/or help those who are in need. Instead, according to Hurston's (1981) characteristics of absence of the concept of privacy, these students will not have a reserve, so they may feel as if they are part of a community. Hurston's characteristics stress the importance of culture and community, which allow more opportunity for engagement by focusing on the positive results from these characteristics. For example, in dance Hurston describes the performer as being able to encourage others to finish the suggested action of the dancer. If teachers utilize drama, it will enable them to observe how students may interpret language in multiple ways.

**Scene 4, Strategy 4.** Use alternative presentation modalities (other than lecturing). This will be helpful when teaching information.

Many African American students implement a colorful use of language (i.e., metaphors, clichés, and idioms) and they also display creativity and risk taking. Teachers may mistakenly interpret these behaviors as impulsive, or they may feel that the students are trying to gain attention. If teachers consider and implement alternative presentation modalities to enrich the learning experience of African American students with ADHD, it will allow them to learn in their preferred learning mode (i.e., audio, visual, kinesthetic). Thus, Hurston's (1981) expressive characteristic of imitation and Boykin's (1994, 2011) cultural style of expressive individualism will be met using the different teaching modalities.

*Flip the Script* ~ As previously mentioned, students diagnosed with ADHD are expressive and demonstrative, resourceful, unique, clever, and innovative personal styles. Using a variety of instructional styles increases the likelihood that all students will be able to learn information in a manner that caters to their area(s) of strength. Teachers who provide a picture, gesture, and/or description of information allows students to see, hear and/or feel what they are expected to know and it provides them with a model of the expected outcome.

#### Curtain Call

Culturally competent teachers are effective with diverse students. They are able to recognize and understand their own worldviews, which enables them to improve their ability to understand the different worldviews of their students (Bennett, 1993). Additionally, teachers who confront their personal biases and stereotypes learn more about their students' cultures, and perceive the world through diverse cultural lenses (Banks, 1994).

If teachers are aware of the different norms, values, systems, customs, learning, communication, and behavioral styles of diverse populations, they will be better equipped to understand how culture affects learning. Teachers who realize that "we need more drama" understand the importance of using non-traditional methods in the classroom. Drama can be utilized for more than just pure entertainment. It can be a highly effective teaching and learning tool that can provide students with the opportunity to utilize drama as an outlet to practice speaking in public and as a way to display creativity. It can also allow students with and without ADHD and other high incidence disabilities to work with others in a manner that lead to success in and outside the classroom environment.

## AUTHOR NOTES

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## Improving Educational Outcomes for Minority Males in Our Schools

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This article examines the academic underachievement and disproportionate special education placement of minority males. Causes and consequences for poor academic performance by minority males are reviewed. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and No Child Left Behind Act are discussed in relation to minority male academic achievement. Finally, strategies are presented for improving outcomes for minority males.

*Keywords:* Minority males, academic achievement, cultural bias, IDEA, NCLB

Sixty years after the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, KS* (1954), disparities in education outcomes for minority and majority students remain a persistent problem (Gardner & Miranda, 2001; Skiba et al., 2011), and African American, Latino, and Native American students consistently underperform on academic measures (DeValenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006; Paul, 2004). Academic disparities are even greater when outcomes of only minority males are considered (Artiles, & Trent, 1994; Greene, & Forster, 2003). For example, disaggregated data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2010) revealed that 51.3% of 12<sup>th</sup> grade African American males possess below basic reading skills when compared to 36.1% of African American females, 24.3% of White males, and 13.1% of White females.

Poor academic performance by students can result in consequences such as dropping out of school, special education placement, limited postsecondary opportunities, and low paying jobs (Bridgeland, DiIulio & Morison, 2006; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004; McLoyd & Purtell, 2008). The impact of poor academic skills is not limited to underachieving students. Its impact is felt within their communities and across the nation. America must develop and maintain a well-educated and diverse workforce to compete in a world economy increasingly driven by communication and technology (Hernandez, 2009; U. S. Department of Education, 2012). However, individuals with poor academic skills are ill prepared to compete in a technology driven job market. President Obama recognized the need for a well-educated and diverse workforce and has since established two critical initiatives—a goal of 60% of Americans obtaining a college degree by 2020 (U. S. Department of Education, 2012), and the establishment of the “My Brother’s Keeper” program (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper>)—to improve outcomes for Latino and African American males.

In order for minority males (i.e., African American, Latino, and Native Americans) to achieve the goal of improved outcomes, they must have access to quality education throughout their schooling. Access to quality education is the foundation for developing knowledgeable and



productive citizens (Kauffman, Conroy, Gardner, & Oswald, 2008). This article examines the current state of academic outcomes for minority males, identifies possible causes for poor academic achievement, discusses what is being done to improve the academic outcomes of minority males, and provides recommendations for the future.

### **Academic Achievement Of Minority Males**

The disparity of the academic achievement between minority and majority students has been a concern for decades (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2009). At the time of the Brown (1954) decision the reason for poor academic performance by minority students seemed clear with the culprit being institutional racism enforced through separate and unequal school systems. Schools for minority children (e.g., African American) were grossly underfunded and poorly resourced when compared to schools for children from the dominant culture. At that time, the solution for eliminating academic racial disparities was the integration of schools as a means to allow all children equal access to educational experiences.

However, fourteen years after the Brown desegregation decision, Dunn (1968) raised the issue of minority children, especially males, being disproportionately placed in special education classes. Research conducted by Dunn found that African Americans, particularly males, were being referred to special education (i.e., mild mental retardation category) at a rate that exceeded their percentage of school enrollment. Later, researchers identified disproportionate special education placements for Native American and Latino males (Artiles, & Trent, 1994; Ford, 2012; Harry & Kingner, 2006).

In the decades since the Brown decision and research findings by Dunn, initiatives to remedy the disproportionate placement of minority students in special education and close the achievement gap between minority and majority students have been put forward. Some of these initiatives were included in federal legislation—the *Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004* and *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*—with the goal of improving the quality of education for all children, including children with disabilities.

### **IDEA and Minority Males**

The disproportional placement of minority males in special education is a challenging issue that involves how minority male students are identified and the education services they receive. IDEA (2004 [P.L. 108-446]) mandates that educators identify all children who have disabilities and provide them with a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. In an effort to be inclusive, definitions within the special education categories, particularly learning disabilities, behavior disorders, and mild intellectual disabilities (referred to as mild disabilities) are purposely vague (Anastasiou, Gardner, & Michail, 2011). An unintended consequence of definitional vagueness may be the inclusion of individuals, particularly minorities, in special education who do not have disabilities (Anastasiou et al.). Native American and African American students are at higher risk for special education placement than any other ethnic group (KewelRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007; Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006; U. S. Department of Education, 2009). Native American and Latinos males are at a higher risk for being placed in the special education category of learning

disability (Anastasiou et al., 2011), while African American males are typically disproportionately placed in the special education categories of mild intellectual disability and behavior disorders (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The rate of placement for Latino students is close to expectations, based on the national Latino population. However, when data is analyzed at the state and district levels, pockets of disproportionality are found (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002; Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007). There is also evidence that Latinos with disabilities are more likely than Whites to receive instruction in a restrictive environment (e.g., self-contained classroom) (Perez, Skiba, & Chung, 2008).

Concerns about disproportionality prompted the Office for Civil Rights to commission the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study to identify the causes for the disproportionate placement of minority males (i.e., African Americans) into the category of mild intellectual disability. Results of the study, *Placing Children in Special Education: A Strategy for Equity* (National Research Council, 1982) revealed that teachers referred minority students for special education testing, but did not refer White students that exhibited similar characteristics. They also found that evaluators used different types of tests, more tests, or a different interpretation of test results to determine that minority students needed special education services. Additionally, data indicated that Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) was not followed in many cases where minority students with special need were placed in self-contained classrooms, while similarly situated White students are placed in regular classrooms. Moreover, a delay in the evaluation and placement of students was found to affect children of all races and national origins (U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2009).

Data from the aforementioned report served as a catalyst for the development of multi-factored assessments to determine if a disability label was warranted for a child. In fact, many of the recommendations from the report are embedded in the language of the IDEA reauthorization of 2004 such as gathering information from parents; examining authentic education products as well as standardized tests; reemphasizing the importance of parents as partners in the education of their children with disabilities; and placing a strong emphasis on improving the quality of instruction for students.

Further, IDEA (2004) directly addresses the issue of racial disproportionality at both the national and state levels. Racial disproportionality was designated as one of three areas for monitoring and enforcement. IDEA requires states and local educational agencies (LEAs) to actively engage in steps to address the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education. Part B regulations include key guidelines of how states are to monitor LEAs to determine if disproportionate representations of minorities are receiving special education and related services in their states due to inappropriate identification. States are further required to collect and examine data to determine if significant disproportionality in special education (e.g., behavior disorders, intellectual disabilities, and specific learning disabilities) based on race and ethnicity exists on the state and LEA levels. States must also monitor the educational settings in which children receive services (e.g., general education classroom, resource room, self-contained classroom) and the types of disciplinary actions used to discipline children (including suspensions and expulsions). The provision also require LEAs use evidence-based assessments (e.g., response to intervention [RtI]) to assess culturally and linguistically diverse (CDL)

students, such as English Language Learners (ELLs), prior to referring these learners for possible special education placement (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Orosco & Klingner, 2010).

The collection of data on ethnicity provides the opportunity for educators to determine if patterns of disproportionality exist within their districts and/or schools, such as a higher number of minority students being placed in special education categories. Educators should use this data to analyze the impact of their policies on subgroups within the school district. The higher rates of special education placements for minority males are important indicators that cultural biases may be impacting the placement process (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Countinho & Oswald, 2000; Kauffman & Landrum, 2009; Losen & Orfield, 2002). In other words, disproportional representation of minority males in special education categories could be due to factors other than disabilities, meaning that educators may misinterpret culturally based behavior differences, causing some culturally different students to wrongly receive disability labels. Also, some teachers may have deficit thinking reflected in low expectations/biases toward minority males, which can lead to the misinterpretation of behaviors (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Frazier Trotman, 2002).

### **No Child Left Behind and Minority Males**

Similar to IDEA's promise of an appropriate education for all children with disabilities, a central purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act was to ensure that all children are provided access to a quality education (National Center on Educational Outcomes [NCEO], 2003). NCLB promises that all children, particularly those in high poverty schools (which tend to have predominately minority student populations) would receive a quality education designed to promote academic success. Schools are judged by the ability of their students to meet the federal academic guidelines on standardized assessments required to demonstrate adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Yell, 2012). NCLB also mandates that education data be disaggregated so that the academic progress of ethnic subgroups and economically disadvantaged students can be monitored. This was a central component to the law for the purpose of providing educators with the information required to assure appropriate academic progress for all students (Yell, 2012). In other words, the goal was to provide a quality (i.e., equal) education for all learners and subsequently decrease the academic achievement gap between minority and majority students.

The implementation of empirically validated instruction is essential to the efforts for decreasing the achievement gap between minority and majority children, as well as children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Stearns, 2002). Schools with students who continued to perform poorly academically, across multiple years, would be in jeopardy of faculty being replaced and the school curriculum revamped. NCLB pushed states to examine curricula and how effectively children in their schools were instructed. In response, state departments of education attempted to improve outcomes for children through the development of academic standards for students, especially in reading and math in their respective states (Carmichael, Martino, Porter-Magee, & Wilson, 2010).

These aforementioned efforts evolved into a national movement to create a common course of academic standards across states (i.e., Common Core <http://www.corestandards.org>) -- the

common core. Common Core has two foci, college and career readiness standards and the K-12 standards.

The college and career readiness standards were designed to assess what students should know when graduating from high school (i.e., postsecondary readiness). K-12 standards were designed to address academic standards in elementary through high school. However, despite the intentions of these education initiatives to date, the achievement gap between minorities and majority students remain relatively constant (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011).

Neither IDEA, NCLB, or Common Core is a perfect education initiative; yet, each seeks to promote quality education for all children. This is a critical and necessary step in improving outcomes for minority male students. However, the authors believe that in order to make substantive changes in closing the achievement gap and decreasing disproportionality, educators and policymakers must do more than develop guidelines and collect data on the disparities. That is, there must be a more systematic and effective implementation of effective instruction for all students throughout their education experiences. While IDEA and NCLB have flaws, both also contain positive features. For example, IDEA and NCLB require teachers to utilize empirically validated instructional strategies and assessments that are intended to promote effective classroom instruction. The premise is that if all students receive quality instruction, more children will experience academic success thereby reducing the number of students (including minority males) who underachieve and/or are referred for special education placement.

However, despite the intent of these laws, a significant improvement in the outcomes of minority students, especially males (Vanneman, Hamilton, Baldwin-Anderson, & Rahman, 2009) has not been realized. In 2009, the graduation rate for White males was 76% compared to graduation rates for Native American, African American, and Latino males—i.e., 58%, 52%, and 50%, respectively (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2012; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). This does not mean that the education laws are incorrect in calling for empirically validated instruction for all students. The fact is, numerous studies have demonstrated that when students from diverse cultural backgrounds are instructed using empirically validated strategies they can be academically successful (Cartledge, Yurick, Singh, Keyes & Kourea, 2011; Gardner, Cihon, Morrison, & Paul, 2013; Gardner, Heward, & Grossi, 1994/2001; Kauffman et al., 2008; Moats & Foorman, 2008; Therrien, Gormley, & Kubina, 2006). Unfortunately, the implementation of effective instruction has been poorly and inconsistently executed, particularly in schools in high poverty neighborhoods that often have a majority minority student population (McLoyd & Purtell, 2008), thus placing minority students at an increased risk for underachievement and special education placement.

### **Cultural Bias and Poverty**

One reason for concern about disproportionality and poor academic performances by minority males is that they may be indicators that historical inequities and racial biases influence how minority males are treated (Patton, 1998). Educators have often chosen to acknowledge the existence of disparities between ethnic groups but avoid the difficult conversations involving the pervasive issue of cultural bias and its influence in American schools (Singleton & Linton,

2006). The results have often been efforts to address symptoms of cultural bias and not the systemic root of cultural bias. In other words, strategies were recommended and implemented that were designed to reduce the achievement gap but the attitudes of educators who were to implement the strategies remained unchanged (Singleton & Linton). Though academic content is impartial and unbiased, individuals can be biased toward others and in some cases develop or maintain policies that inherently favor one ethnic group over another (James, 2012), i.e., a policy for the selection of gifted and talented students that emphasizes performance on IQ tests and other academic measures, while deemphasizing other creative forms of giftedness. Another potential area of bias is discipline. Educators may apply harsher consequences to minority males than majority males for similar behaviors (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Townsend, 2000). Often these consequences include removal from the classroom (e.g., suspension or expulsion) thereby decreasing students' opportunities to learn and increasing their risk for academic underachievement.

Additionally, educators must have skills in discerning culturally based behavior from disability related behaviors. Children engaging in actions that are appropriate within their culture may have their behaviors misinterpreted. Minority males may appear to be nonchalant about school and their education, however this nonchalant attitude may not reflect their real feelings toward school but is an important part of their street persona (Allen & Boykin, 1992).

Finally, culturally based behaviors should not be used to place children in special education (Ford, 2012). For example, the use of nonstandard English by students both in speech and writing may cause some teachers to view them as possibly having a disability in written or oral communication, when in reality, the students are following the language conventions for their culture. Therefore, they are not demonstrating a disability but reflecting a learned language. These students may need additional instruction to become proficient in Standard English but language differences are not necessarily indicative of a disability (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009).<sup>1</sup>

A critical step in addressing the disproportionate placement of minority males in special education, and the achievement gap, is to prepare teachers who are culturally sensitive with the knowledge of how bias can manifest in education decisions to prevent the unnecessary placement of minority males in special education. Further, teachers need to be trained in effective pedagogy and how to modify their instructional delivery so that it is culturally sensitive (Cartledge et al., 2009). The development of culturally sensitive teachers will require that colleges of education emphasize the role culture plays in education in terms of potentially negative and positive consequences.

### **Poverty and Minority Males**

Another factor that can impact education outcomes for students is poverty. Ethnic disparities in poverty are well documented in the United States (Hosp & Reschly, 2004). According to research, one quarter of African American and Native American children and 22% of Hispanic

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<sup>1</sup> See Tyrone C. Howard (2010) for a full discussion of the influence of race and culture in American schools.

children live in poverty, compared with 11% of Asians and 8% of Whites (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Lee, 2006).

Children from poor families often begin school with fewer important school-related skills than their more affluent peers (Hart, & Risley, 1995) and these children may behave differently due to environmental circumstances associated with poverty. When behavior differences are paired with low teacher expectations (e.g., bias) children may be mistakenly viewed as having a disability. The disaggregation of special education data mandated by IDEA has consistently yielded a pattern of African American, Latino, and Native American males being at increased risk for special education placement and more restrictive learning environments than their White counterparts (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004). The combination of ethnicity and poverty risk factors only increase the need for culturally sensitive teachers.

Also, because poverty is sometimes used as the primary reason for the poor performance of minority males in the schools (Anastasiou et al., 2011; Donovan & Cross, 2002), educators need to have an understanding of how it influences behaviors. Research has shown that there is a correlational relationship between family wealth and academic achievement (Neuman, 2008). As such, minority families, due to America's history of discrimination, have not always had the same opportunities as other families to amass wealth (Gardner & Mayes, 2013). It seems disingenuous to have historically restricted the economic opportunities for minority groups then use low SES as a rationale to explain why they are unsuccessful. Regardless of the cause of poverty, minority children are more likely to live in poor communities and experience the toxic effects of poverty, increasing their risk for special education placement and poor academic achievement (Oswald, Coutinho, & Best, 2002). However, poverty as a risk factor does not explain why minority males have a higher risk than minority females for special education placement and poor academic achievement. Therefore, it is difficult to eliminate bias particularly toward minority males as an influencing factor for disproportionality and poor academic achievement (Qswald et al., 2002). Nevertheless, educators need to understand how certain patterns of behaviors develop and flourish in impoverished communities. Given these circumstances educators need to acquire the knowledge and skills on how to promote academic achievement among impoverished children.

One proffered solution to the poor academic performance of disadvantaged children is to have them attend more effective schools (e.g., suburban schools). If the quality of instruction in schools in low-income neighborhoods is less effective, then access to quality instruction within more affluent schools may serve as a solution. However, as attractive as this solution may be, simply placing minority and disadvantaged males into more affluent schools does not always yield the desired results of education equity (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

Transferring minority males from a poor performing school to a more academically rigorous school may require additional support to enable them to experience success. However, if educators at the new school are predisposed to believe that minority children and/or poor children are academically less capable (i.e., deficit thinking), it may cause them to maintain lower expectations for minority children (Ahram et al., 2011). Rather than providing the academic support for a successful transition into a new school, these minority males may be at a higher risk for special education placement (Gardner & Miranda, 2001). If minority males are

not referred for special education, teachers' low expectations for these youngsters may result in their placement in less academically rigorous general education courses offered by the school (McPherson, 2010). Consequently, minority males are at greater risk for lower academic achievement and poorer educational outcomes compared to majority students, even in more academically rigorous schools.

### **Improving Outcomes for Minority Males**

How can educators reverse the negative trends that impact minority males? A critical factor for academic achievement is high quality instruction. Teachers' knowledge of effective instructional strategies is foundational to improving outcomes for minority males (Kauffman et al., 2008). Both IDEA and NCLB mandate the implementation of effective pedagogy. The implementation of empirically validated instruction as intended by these laws will improve access to a quality education for all children, including minority males.

Teachers should also have skills in making data-based instructional decisions. The ability to use empirically validated instructional strategies and make data-based decisions will allow teachers to appropriately implement a three-tier RtI model that insures that all children receive empirically validated instruction; and those that need additional help will receive small group or one on one instruction (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). RtI allows for the more judicious use of education resources (Barnett, Daly, Jones, & Lentz, 2004), which is important in urban schools where resources are often limited. Additionally, teachers need to possess skills in working with diverse student populations.

*Culturally sensitive pedagogy.* Developing culturally sensitive teachers is vital to improving outcomes for minority males. Culturally sensitive teachers have expertise in empirically validated instructional strategies and they have the ability to effectively incorporate students' culture into the curriculum in meaningful ways. Culturally sensitive teachers are also better able to determine whether a child is demonstrating traits that are associated with a disability or simply a cultural difference (Cartledge et al., 2009; Equity Assistance Centers, 2008).

Cultural sensitivity is essential knowledge for determining the appropriate educational placement for minority males (i.e., special education, general education, gifted education, etc.); and making the correct educational placement decision is vital to improving the academic achievement of minority males. If students are not appropriately placed in the right educational environment based on their instructional needs, it is virtually impossible for these students to receive a quality education. The benefit of an appropriate and effective education throughout their academic career provides minority males with the best opportunity to achieve academically and to become positive contributors to society after high school graduation.

A related consideration for improving outcomes for minority males is the identification of the most rigorous academic curriculum in which the students can be successful. The authors believe when students are not placed in rigorous curricula designed to maximize their academic potential, students are not receiving an appropriate education. Students wrongly placed in an instructional environment may be less prepared for postsecondary opportunities, and their lack of preparedness may have lifelong consequences (i.e., limiting career opportunities).

Achieving the goal of an appropriate education for all students requires commitment by educators, parents, and colleges of education. Colleges of education and school districts must train and insist that teachers use empirically validated pedagogy in all classrooms as well as regularly assess the effectiveness of their instruction, based on student achievement. Additionally, teachers should enhance the curricula to include positive examples of minority males. The authors believe that inclusion of positive minority males in the curricula can increase the minority males' interest in academics and serve as a positive model of the benefits of academic achievement.

If effective culturally sensitive instruction were systematically implemented across all schools as recommended by NCLB, children will benefit academically. Students who struggle in classrooms where empirically validated instruction is implemented can be selected for additional and more intense instruction using a RtI model. Children who continue to struggle despite the implementation of empirically validated pedagogy and additional instructional opportunities can then be evaluated for special education services.

In addition to the implementation of empirically validated instruction, there should be a special education evaluation process that minimizes the risk of bias due to ethnicity or SES, as intended when IDEA was enacted. That is, the implementation of a nondiscriminatory multi-factored special education assessment process for identifying students with disabilities that is sensitive to cultural differences. This process should include parents/guardians as fully valued members of the IEP team, recognizing the fact that parents are the resident experts about their children. The assessments also should include culturally sensitive tools including authentic products, observation, and multiple tests. Additionally, educators should be aware that minority males may have different behavior patterns than White students and these differences should be viewed within their cultural context.

Lastly, the identification of an appropriate educational setting is not a one-time decision. The education process is dynamic. It requires regular and careful analysis of the students' performances to determine if students are appropriately placed and making progress commensurate to their abilities. As such, educators need to regularly evaluate students' academic progress, including educational placements. However, the periodic evaluation of the appropriateness of a child educational placement should not be restricted only to those in special education. It should also include those in general and gifted education.

### **Conclusion**

Minority males continue to lag behind their peers academically despite the implementation of IDEA and NCLB. However, educators can use the important concepts in these laws such as the use of empirically validated pedagogy to improve the quality of instruction for minority males. Providing an appropriate education for all students is the most important charge of each LEA. Our society's well being depends on schools playing an active role in the development and education of children, and helping them to become productive members of society. Given the achievement gap between minority and majority males, it is critical that educators employ culturally sensitive and empirically validated pedagogy to maximize instructional gains for minority males. Minority parents also have an indispensable role to play in the education



experiences by collaborating with educators. Parents and teachers working together can increase the likelihood of minority males receiving a quality education.

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# **School Discipline Disproportionality: Culturally Competent Interventions for African American Males**

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Exclusionary policies are practiced widely in schools despite being associated with extremely poor outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students, particularly African American males with and without disabilities. This article discusses zero tolerance policies, the related research questioning their basic assumptions, and the negative effects on students in special education and the larger society. Behavioral and academic interventions also are discussed relative to evidence of effectiveness, potential outcomes, and culturally responsive applications.

*Keywords:* African American males, culturally competent interventions, disproportionality, schoolwide positive behavior intervention supports, special education

School wide disciplinary practices are necessary for order and safety, and it is also necessary for maintaining control of students in schools (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Noguera, 2003). For almost four decades, an abundance of research findings and national and state data have documented that students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds, particularly African Americans with and without disabilities, are overrepresented in school disciplinary sanctions compared to their enrollment rates across the United States (Children's Defense Fund, 1975; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al., 2008; Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin, & Swain-Bradway, 2011). Not only do students from CLD backgrounds in special and general education, especially students with severe emotional disorders (SED), learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD) receive higher rates of suspensions, expulsions, and office disciplinary referrals, they are also more likely to be referred to special education and the criminal justice system and are thus, excluded from accessing the general education curriculum (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Krezmien, Leone, Zablocki, & Wells, 2010; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011; Vincent & Tobin, 2011).

Discipline is a complex construct that can mean step-by-step progress in some type of training and preparation to achieve a goal or effect; or, it can be a means to accomplish an end (Adams, 2000). When viewed in the context of the aforementioned definition, discipline in schools may be: (a) disproportionately delivered to obtain a desired effect or (b) be used to master a desirable end; that is, used to control a group or behaviors by maintaining predictability.



Discipline in the schools has been increasingly harsh, despite research findings refuting their effectiveness in reducing behavior problems, and most importantly, the negative impact on a diverse and progressively larger segment of our population. Educators and policy makers need to unite to find solutions that change the trajectory or direction of the lives of youth, especially African American males with and without disabilities (APA, Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Drakeford, 2004; Gregory et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003; Skiba & Peterson 2000; Townsend, 2000).

In this article, we discuss research findings regarding zero tolerance policies and other current school disciplinary practices refuting the underlying assumptions for the widespread use of exclusionary practices in schools. We then review decades of evidence on the impact of zero tolerance policies and other factors that contribute to the poor academic and behavior outcomes of (CLD) students, with emphasis on African American males with and without disabilities. Finally, we discuss emerging research on positive behavioral and academic culturally responsive interventions that have the potential to fulfill the promise of truly leaving “no child left behind.”

### **Current Disciplinary Practices in Schools**

Almost four decades have elapsed since the Children’s Defense Fund (1975) reported racial disproportionality in school disciplinary practices (Drakeford, 2004; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Despite criticisms that zero tolerance practices are: (a) ineffective in deterring school violence; (b) not well defined; (c) general in nature; and (4) often lead to varying interpretations of intent, context, and meaning of behaviors, widespread use of these punitive practices continue to be implemented in schools across the United States (Gregory, et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Vincent & Tobin, 2011).

By 1998, 94% of all U.S. public schools utilized some type of zero tolerance policies (Krezmien et al., 2006; National Association of School Psychologist, 2001). Findings from data collected by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (2011) revealed that during the 2006 academic school year, 3.25 million or 7% of school age students in K-12 were suspended at least one time and 102,077 were expelled (Losen, 2011).

Researchers have validated the use of office disciplinary referral (ODR) data as a reliable measure to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, make program level decisions regarding interventions, and make informed decisions at the student, group, and system levels (Bradshaw, Mitchell, O’Brennan, & Leaf, 2010; Kaufman et al., 2010). ODR data has been used to predict future school behavior, but have been criticized by some researchers because the validity of the data is predetermined or impacted primarily by school administrators (Irvin, Tobin, Sprague, Sugai, & Vincent, 2004; Nelson, Benner, Reid, Epstein, & Benner, 2003). Other concerns are the lack of consistency in implementing policies in the schools and teacher interpretations of policies/behaviors (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Despite issues surrounding the use of ODR data, these data provide opportunities for the examination of institutional, school, and classroom behaviors to identify the extent to which these policies/practices contribute to overrepresentation and gaps in achievement.

*Zero Tolerance.* Since the passage of the Gun Free Schools Act (1994), federal policy adopted a zero tolerance for firearms, requiring a one-year expulsion for possession on school grounds (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In an effort to maintain control, many states extended the federal policy to include less serious violations including: fighting, improper off campus behavior, and several other behaviors interpreted as disruptive (Krezmien et al., 2006; Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

The zero tolerance or “one-strike-you’re-out” policy is defined as the automatic expulsion of students who bring weapons or items that look like weapons to school or policies that mandate the application of predetermined consequences without consideration of the severity of the behavior, circumstances, or the environmental context (American Psychological Association [APA] Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Ashford, 2000;). Consequently, many of the disciplinary policies and practices used in schools often mirror, or in some instances, are harsher than those used with adults in the criminal justice system because school administrators are required to refer any weapon or drug violations to the courts irrespective of the mitigating circumstance or situation (Krezmien et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003).

School administrators justify using exclusionary practices as their primary method of maintaining order and control, even for minor infractions, based on several popular, but false, assumptions: (a) school violence is on the rise, (b) zero tolerance deters students from acting out, (c) zero tolerance provides students with a consistent message regarding expectations and consequences, (d) removing disruptive students creates a conducive learning environment for others, and (e) zero tolerance is supported by students, parents and people in the community (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010; Krezmien et al., 2006; Noguera, 2003).

The underlying assumption that school violence is on the rise because of the rash of school shootings in rural districts justify the widespread use of zero tolerance policies to keep students safe is arguably false and lacks empirical support (Drakeford, 2004; Noguera, 2003). In addition to the findings from the APA Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008), several other studies indicate that school violence remained steady or has declined since the mid 1980’s and has been on a downward trend since the mid 1990’s (Drakeford, 2004; Noguera, 2003; Vincent, Randall, Cartledge, Tobin, & Swain-Bradway, 2011).

The presumption and regular practice of removing disruptive students from school in an effort to create safer environments has also not been substantiated in the literature (APA, Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). In fact, data indicate the exact opposite. Overall, schools that implement zero tolerance practices frequently have higher rates of suspensions and expulsions, more negative school climates, poorer school management structure, and spend a much greater portion of school time focused on discipline problems (APA, Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Noguera, 2003). More importantly however, is the fact that research findings reveal that suspended students are more likely to be males who are academically at risk for failure, most likely receiving special education services, and typically from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (APA, Zero Tolerance Task Force; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). These youth are also more likely to have involvement in the criminal justice system (Bradshaw et al., 2010).



## Disproportionality and School Discipline

The literature is replete with a multitude of studies documenting the impact of exclusionary practices, like zero tolerance on youth. These studies reveal that African Americans, Latinos, students with disabilities, males, and low achievers have a higher probability for exclusion than youth from other cultural groups (Bowman-Perrott, et al., 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Lo & Cartledge, 2007; Losen, 2011; Noguera, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Townsend, 2000; U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Vincent, Swain-Bradway, Tobin, & May, 2011). For example, Losen (2011) reported that African American male middle school students were 28% more likely to be suspended at least once, almost three times that of the 10% for White students. In a 2014 “Dear Colleague Letter” from the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, the federal government pointed out that African American students without disabilities were three times more likely than White students to be expelled or suspended. Although, African American students made up only 15% of the students in their data collection, of this percentage, 35% were suspended once, 44% suspended more than once, and 36% expelled. Additionally, African American and Hispanic students constituted 50% of those involved in school-related arrests. These outcomes are more bleak for African American students with disabilities.

African American students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be suspended than those without disabilities and for longer periods of time (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). With the exception of Latino and Asian Americans, one in four males (20%) and one in four females (12%) from CLD backgrounds with disabilities, had received an out-of-school suspension (Skiba, Arredondo, & Rausch, 2014). Bowman-Perrott and colleagues (2013) studied the exclusionary patterns for students with disabilities and found that students at greatest risk were those with emotional behavioral disorders (EBD), followed by those with attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities (LD). Additionally, these data revealed that early grade exclusions (e.g., kindergarten and first grade) were predictive of subsequent later exclusions. It was also revealed that males were two times more likely than females to be excluded, and African Americans were two times more likely to be excluded than other race peers. Sullivan, Klingbeil, and Van Norman (2013) also examined disciplinary patterns for students with disabilities and obtained significant findings for race and disability, with rates for African American students being three times greater than those for White students. African American students with disabilities were most likely to be suspended and were 70% more likely than their other race peers with disabilities to have multiple exclusions.

Many critics of the disparity in school discipline data typically argue that African American students misbehave more often and have more serious infractions than other students. Losen (2013), however, refutes this argument, showing research that African American students are more likely to be suspended for discretionary offenses (offenses that may or may not require suspension based on safety concerns) than nondiscretionary offenses (carrying a weapon or drugs). In fact, White students were more likely than African American students to be suspended for weapons or drugs. In addition, African American students were more likely to have longer suspensions for minor offenses such as having a cell phone or disruptions. Rocque and Paternoster (2011) support this position with research conducted on data from more than 19,000 students in 45 elementary schools. Controlling for behavior, student demeanor, personality,

grades and other factors, the researchers found that Black students still were more likely to have disciplinary reports, pointing to race as a key factor. Other studies report similar findings, noting African Americans are referred to the office for minor offenses and for subjective reasons such as making noise, disrespectful behavior, and verbal threats; whereas, White students were referred for clear violations, including smoking and vandalism (APA, Zero Tolerance Task force, 2008; Bradshaw et al., 2010).

### **Disciplinary Outcomes of CLD Students With and Without Disabilities**

The frequent suspension of students from CLD backgrounds has been shown to significantly increase the risk of poorer academic, behavioral, and postschool outcomes (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Townsend, 2000). In an era of standards-based reform as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), schools are required to demonstrate progress towards reducing the achievement gap among students from CLD populations and their White peers (Wenglinsky, 2004). However, research findings have documented that the widespread use of suspension and expulsion methods as the primary school disciplinary practice for CLD students has contributed to the persistent gap in achievement (Gregory et al., 2010; Krezmien et al., 2006). African American males with and without disabilities, in particular, are at a greater risk for academic failure. Rocque and Paternoster (2011) contend that these excessive exclusions are fueling the school to prison pipeline. Although, African Americans and students with disabilities represent only 16% and 12% of the student enrollment, they are approximately two times more likely to be referred to law enforcement (27% and 25%) or to have a school-related arrest (31% and 25%) respectively. In comparison, White students represent 51% of the student enrollment, 41% of the referrals to law enforcement, and 39% of those arrested (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2014). Research has documented that the continued poor outcomes only serve to increased behavior problems, lead to higher school dropout rates, substance abuse, and homelessness (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013; U.S. Departments of Justice and Education, 2014).

*Academic outcomes.* The negative consequences of missed academic instruction as a result of being suspended or expelled from school have been well documented in the literature (Gregory et al., 2010; Lo & Cartledge, 2006; Townsend, 2000; Vincent et al., 2011). In schools, Bradshaw et al. (2010) indicated that suspended students were more likely to be male, in special education, and come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Gregory et al., 2010).

Findings also indicate that schools that report frequently utilizing zero tolerance policies and other “one strike you’re out” practices have higher rates of referrals to both the office and juvenile court system. They also reveal that suspended students are tracked into lower level courses, labeled as behavior problems, and referred to special education; they develop negative perceptions of school, become truant and eventually drop out (Gregory et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Townsend, 2000). For example, African American boys, historically, receive at least one suspension that lead to missed instructional time and when exposed repeatedly to negative consequences, may potentially cement a cycle of academic failure and continued behavioral problems (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). Generally, suspension results in students being denied access to instruction for one class period for up to ten days or more (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008).

Although not directly connected empirically, the persistent poor academic performance of African American males and students from CLD backgrounds is additional support of the potential pernicious effects of excessive exclusions on school success of African American students. Despite some progress toward closing the achievement gap among racial and ethnic groups, the most recent assessments reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014) from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) report showed that reading and math gaps are still substantial for African American students, with males showing the greatest disparities. In 2009, for example, the NAEP reported that compared to 33% of White males, only 9% of Black males in 8<sup>th</sup> grade had reading percentages at or above proficient levels. In 2011, the NAEP reported that compared to 34% of fourth graders who read at or above the proficient level, this was the case for only 11% of students with disabilities and 17% of Black students.

*Behavioral outcomes.* The racial patterns in high school discipline and achievement predict the number of African American men who are incarcerated, as compared to those enrolled in colleges or universities (Gregory et al., 2010; Ziedenberg & Schiraldi, 2002;). In the mid 1970's, the enrollment of African Americans in college steadily increased. Since that time, the rates of attendance for African Americans at postsecondary institutions of any type have declined, especially among African American males (Drakeford, 2004; Noguera, 2003). The phrase used to describe the direct relationship between schools, CLD students, and the juvenile justice system is "school-to-prison-pipeline" (Krezmien et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003; Rocque & Paternoster, 2011).

As discussed earlier, the Gun Free Schools Act (1994) and its zero tolerance mandates have significantly increased school-based referrals of CLD male students for much less serious offenses. General patterns persisted for race and gender, consistent with what is typically reported in the research literature (Krezmien et al., 2010; Noguera, 2003; Skiba et al., 2008). That is, Black males with or without special needs are referred disproportionately even though behavior research does not appear to justify these disproportionate referrals (Rocque & Paternoster, 2011).

In considering the research findings, educators and advocates need to be concerned about the patterns and cumulative effects of office and school referrals to the juvenile court system on all students, especially students with disproportionate referrals such as those with disabilities and African American males. Schools need to develop interventions, internal structures, and policies that will not only reduce referrals but also increase the overall school and later life success of the most vulnerable students. While the approaches for addressing the problem of disproportionality vary in format and implementation, we consider four culturally competent options germane to teachers—i.e., teacher factors, behavioral interventions, academic/reading interventions, and school policies/structure.

## **Culturally Competent Interventions**

### **Teacher Factor**

Failing to justify the disproportionate disciplinary rates for African American males by higher rates of problem behavior, Rocque and Paternoster (2011) speculated on the role of teacher

perceptions or stereotypes. The authors suggest that teachers perceive Black students' behaviors to be more hostile than those of other students, whereas, these students are seen as menacing and a racial threat. Empirical support is found in studies showing that teachers often give African American students, especially males, lower evaluations than warranted (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008), and they are more likely to be reprimanded for vague, more subjective behaviors such as defiance (Day-Vines & Terriquez, 2008; Skiba et al., 2002). Males often complain, with some justification, that teachers often misperceive their behavior and punish them more severely than they do females (Farmer, Goforth, Clemmer, & Thompson, 2004) or non-minority males (Day-Vines & Terriquez, 2008). Day-Vines and Terriquez (2008), for example, observed that most of the referrals for their minority males were given for "defiance of authority," which was subjective and not clearly defined and had unevenly delivered consequences. These conditions can lead to resentment and further escalation of classroom problems.

The increasing numbers of White female teachers and students of color in the classroom creates conditions for cultural discontinuities, particularly for African American males with and without disabilities. Referred to as the "diversity gap" recent reports show that nearly one-half of the students attending public schools are from racially/ethnically diverse backgrounds, while more than 80 percent of the teachers are White (Holland, 2014). These differences point to the need for teachers to increase their cultural competence, particularly focusing on socioeconomics and gender. Ferguson's (2001) study of African American elementary males describes the often misguided efforts of young males to assert themselves for male dominance. Ferguson also noted the complicity of the schools in derailing these youth through inadequate instructional programs, uncaring attitudes, and excessive punishment. Similarly, at the middle and high school level, Balfanz (2014) bemoans the "national tragedy" for Latino and African American males. According to Balfanz, the point in which these students become most vulnerable, the schools become weaker and the justice system harsher. Instead of punishment and indifference, Balfanz questions the beneficial effects of increased attention and school involvement.

Gregory and Ripski (2008) found a significant association between teacher reported discipline approach and the behavior of African American high school students as reported both by teacher and student. That is, there was agreement between student and teacher on the approach used and effects. The authors surmised that when students trust the teacher's authority, the students are less likely to react negatively/aggressively to ambiguous teacher cues; probably more likely to give the teacher the benefit of the doubt. Another speculation, with some empirical support, is that a strong teacher-pupil relationship may play a protective role for African American [Black] children at risk for aggressive behavior. Gregory and Ripski (2008) further suggest that relationship building may be especially important for students who differ from their teachers by socioeconomics and race. Strengthening student-teacher relationships may help teachers better understand student's actions and their perceptions of discrimination and unfairness.

### **Behavioral and Academic Interventions**

*Social behavior.* The purposes of school disciplinary policies are two-fold. First, to improve and maintain the integrity of the school's physical and instructional environment. Secondly, to shape student behaviors to facilitate positive interactions and reduce misbehavior (Bradshaw et al., 2010 Skiba, Eckes, & Brown, 2010). Rather than an emphasis on failed exclusionary strategies,

interventions for pupil behavior need to stress prevention and skill development (Skiba et al., 2010; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

School Wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) is a proactive, positive approach aimed at consistently teaching, reinforcing, and applying consistent behavioral consequences, while monitoring the performance of expected behaviors and collecting data for the purpose of making school-wide data driven decisions (Sugai & Horner, 2002; Vincent & Tobin, 2011). The key components of SWPBS are: (a) a statement of purpose that expresses the objective of the SWPBS that is positively phrased, focused on staff and students in all school settings, and is linked to outcomes, (b) clear operationally defined expectations and examples of desired behaviors that allow for consistent language across staff and students, (c) procedures for teaching expectations and the expected behaviors, (d) procedures for reinforcing expected behaviors such as tangible reinforcers or positive attention that occurs on a fixed and/or variable schedule, (e) procedures for preventing problem behavior that are on a continuum and include teaching replacement behaviors, and (f) procedures for record keeping and decision making that allows for analysis across students, time location, behaviors, consequences, and staff members (Sugai & Horner, 2002). This can be accomplished through a three-tiered approach (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention) (Sugai & Horner, 2002). The first tier in the three-tiered approach is the primary prevention program. Systems used in this tier are general and are put in place for all students, staff, and settings; and will meet the needs of approximately 80% of students, many in special education. The secondary prevention tier addresses the needs of approximately 15% of the students. This tier can include small group lessons and more specific reinforcers for this population. In comparison, the tertiary prevention tier addresses the needs of approximately 5% of the population and is highly individualized for students with high intensity or high-risk behaviors such as those exhibited by students with serious emotional disturbance (SED). This tier typically includes a function-based approach to behavioral assessment and interventions, a person centered approach to planning instruction and supports, and a team based approach to problem solving.

In an analysis of data from schools implementing SWPBS, Vincent and Tobin (2011) found that schools that had the highest disciplinary reductions were those that also had the highest measures of implementation. They also found the greatest behavior effects in the high schools were in non-classroom environments, while at the elementary level, the greatest behavior effects were found in the classrooms. Vincent and Tobin (2011) suggested that this made intuitive sense because elementary level students are more directly impacted by classroom settings, but high school students are more directly impacted by non-classroom settings. Despite SWPBS, however, Vincent and Tobin found that African Americans were still excluded at a disproportionate rate and for longer periods of time (approximately 10 days), compared to their other race peers. A subsequent analysis revealed significant differences in racial and discipline data for elementary schools that implemented SWPBS, compared to those that did not implement the intervention. Among their various findings, the researchers observed that although African American students still evidenced disproportionate disciplinary referrals, the disciplinary referrals and the discipline gap declined over the three-years for African American students in schools implementing SWPBS. In contrast, schools that did not implement SWPBS showed disciplinary increases for African American students during this period. Although Vincent and Tobin (2011) included data

on students with IEPs, the effects of SWPBS were difficult to discern from these data due to the limited information that the schools provided about the disabilities of the students.

There is evidence that suggests that behavioral interventions, including social skill instruction, can be effective in improving the school behaviors for African American students with special needs (e.g., Lo & Cartledge, 2006; Lo, Loe, & Cartledge, 2002). Robinson-Ervin (2012) conducted a social skills intervention with African American middle school students with behavior disorders. Six urban middle-school students with EBD were taught social skills on following directions. To make the instruction culturally relevant, the instructor personalized the intervention, using situations, materials, and practice exercises that reflected the students' experiences and backgrounds. Specifically, the researcher first determined from school personnel the behavior most critical for school success needed by these students (i.e., following directions). An interactive instructional social skill lesson was developed so that students could understand the rationale for the skill through reading and discussing a relevant story (i.e., Pandora's Box). The students also were given an opportunity to identify times and conditions under which they did/did not follow directions. The lessons were delivered through the computer using Adobe Captivate so that each student could respond individually and privately. Another aspect of socially competent instruction is to use in the social skill practice groups socially competent peers from the student's peer group reflecting the student's race, age, and gender. A third feature is the use of culturally relevant materials, such as literature. In this study, the researcher used a "Black Card" (credit card taken from the Hip Hop culture) that was popular with these students and a classroom simulation of the corner store. The students obtained reward points on the card to purchase items from the corner store. Another example of cultural relevance was displayed when the researcher used real life school experiences of students as tools for practice during social skill practice lessons/role plays. The instruction occurred weekly over a period of three to seven weeks. A single-subject multiple probe design showed positive results for all students ranging from modest to large effects. The greatest returns occurred for students with the highest level of participation.

An important consideration of social skill instruction, which is an essential component of SWPBS, is that students often need to be taught the specific behaviors desired in schools and other environments. This intervention is based on modeling the desired behavior, eliciting the imitation of the modeled behavior, and giving the student many opportunities to practice the desired skill. The newly desired behavior needs to be taught over an extended period of time and rewarded over an even longer period of time. Although many studies show positive results following social skill interventions, a realistic understanding is that these behaviors will not persist unless teachers and other significant adults in the student's life consistently teach and reinforce these skills throughout the student's schooling. Strategies for teaching and reinforcing desired social behaviors should be part of the pre-service and in-service curriculum for both special and general education teachers.

*Academic.* The implementation of academic interventions targeting procedures related to reading, the structure of academic instruction, and provision of academic supports are all essential to promoting the academic success of students from CLD backgrounds, including students with disabilities. School failure, including special education placement, is often associated to a combination of problems relating to reading and behavior. These problems

typically lead to finding some place to “put” the child, which involves either exclusion from school or placement in special education. A general consensus is that to prevent or minimize this risk, we need to help students become proficient in reading (Hock et al., 2009; Joseph, 2008).

Others recommend improving academic instruction by increasing the time that CLD students receive (including those with disabilities), in English and Math (Balfanz, 2014). Peer mentoring and the implementation of evidence-based practices are also recommended (Balfanz, 2014). Additionally, teachers can demonstrate a caring attitude by making students feel welcome in their classroom and calling them at their homes when they do not attend school. To extend their learning outside the classroom, teachers can provide support for homework through direct help from themselves or via a connection to a homework help resource such as the library (Balfanz, 2014).

### **Interventions with School Policies/Structures**

To successfully address the problem of disciplinary disproportionality for African American males with and without disabilities, schools should consider and employ significant reforms at the policy level related to academics, discipline, mentoring, and school resource officers. The U.S. Departments of Justice and Education (2014) offers several solutions that target these areas. First, provide compensatory, comparable academic services to students receiving in-school or out-of-school suspensions, as well as those expelled, placed in an alternative school, or otherwise removed from academic instruction. Next, revise discipline policies to provide a clearer definition of infractions to ensure that consequences are fair and consistent to reduce the likelihood that students from CLD backgrounds and the most vulnerable group of CLD students (i.e., those with disabilities) are receiving a “free and appropriate public education” (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Additionally, schools and districts must support the development and implementation of policies that support proactive strategies for teaching, including the use of appropriate supports and interventions that encourage and reinforce positive student behaviors and utilize exclusionary discipline as a last resort. Also, a school official should be appointed as a discipline supervisor to ensure that the school implements its discipline policies fairly and equitably to all students, including CLD students with or without disabilities. Additionally, at least annually, schools and school districts should conduct a forum that provides students, teachers, and administrators the opportunity to discuss and provide input on matters relating to discipline and the school’s discipline policies. They should also evaluate the school resource officer’s interventions and practices to assess their effectiveness in helping the school meet its goals and objectives for student safety and discipline. Finally, create a plan for improving teacher-student relationships and develop on-site mentoring programs.

### **Conclusion**

The need to reduce the discipline gap and disproportionality of African American students both with and without disabilities is critical for the continued progress of our society. The fact that 20 years of research findings, collectively, contradict the assumption that zero tolerance policies keep schools safe, document correlations between schools that frequently utilize exclusionary

practices by showing that they have higher rates of referrals and spend more time dealing with discipline problems. However, educators and the court systems are slowly experiencing a paradigm shift that is integrated, culturally sensitive, and outcome oriented.

The persistent gaps in both achievement and discipline result in negative academic, behavioral and postschool outcomes for CLD students, especially African American males with disabilities. African American males, including those with disabilities, have the poorest outcomes of all students in our schools. It is clear that we remain “a nation at-risk” due to the persistent disproportionate discipline and achievement outcomes experienced by students from diverse cultures. Therefore, the emphasis needs to be on proactive and positive interventions that consistently teach, reinforce, evaluate, and monitor the performance of expected behaviors.

While CLD youth are the most targeted for disciplinary infractions because they reside in urban districts where delinquency and zero tolerance policies are most practiced, African American students, with and without disabilities, experience the most negative outcomes, even after controlling for socioeconomic status. In examining data from subcategories, for example, students from CLD backgrounds and those with disabilities, it was revealed that students graduate at rates that are 15% to 20% lower than the national average of 83% (Building a Grad Nation, 2014). Thus, the current levels of academic and disciplinary disparity mean too many students are being poorly served. All schools should aim for the inclusion and success for all students, including students with disabilities, rather than excluding those who don't fit a predetermine model for behavior, learning, or cultural standard.

By using evidenced-based practices, teachers can provide a higher delivery of quality instruction that has proven effective in producing desired outcomes. Evidenced-based interventions are grounded in rigorously tested conceptual and theoretical models. Educators are increasingly being pressured to deliver high quality instruction in an ever increasingly reduced amount of planning time along with limited materials and supports, while somehow producing student test scores that meet or exceed proficiency. Effective instruction alone will not resolve all the issues and challenges experienced by urban districts; however, as suggested by a growing number of researchers, sound practices combined with cultural awareness and culturally responsive teaching will aid immensely in the opportunity to “close the gap” in both discipline and achievement among students from CLD backgrounds, with and without disabilities.

## AUTHOR NOTES

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## **Towards Culturally Responsive and Integrated Instruction for All Learners: The Integrated Learning Model**

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According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011a; 2011b), the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report revealed that African American and Hispanic students with disabilities continue to score well below their White and non-disabled counterparts in all areas tested and across all grade levels. Researchers continue to document the educational inequities experienced by students from these sociocultural groups (e.g., Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009; Bradley & Renzulli, 2011). The authors use a strengths-based perspective to present a culturally responsive, integrated learning model that includes social-class sensitive pedagogy, to promote access, equity, and culturally supported experiences for African American and Hispanic children with disabilities.

*Keywords:* culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally and linguistically diverse learners, academic achievement, at risk students

African American and Hispanic students have a well-documented history of being at-risk for school failure and being overrepresented in special education. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011a; 2011b), results from the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report revealed that students with disabilities and students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) and/or low-income backgrounds continue to score well below their White counterparts in all areas and across all grade levels. Further, these gaps generally do not diminish. In mathematics, the gap increases as students progress through school. The overwhelming majority of these students attend high poverty, low-quality schools where there is little consideration for race, ethnicity, culture, language, or disability (Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009). Despite reform efforts, the quality of education in these schools is generally inferior to that of schools in middle-class neighborhoods (Taines, 2012).

The alienating conditions present in these schools in low-income neighborhoods can lead to a general disengagement from school for many students. In fact, African American students and students with disabilities are twice as likely as their White peers to drop out of school and Hispanic students are two and a half times as likely (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011), beginning a cycle that leads to unemployment and continued poverty as well as potential imprisonment. The consequences of this can be devastating and costly. This article explores an integrated learning model via cultural awareness and action-based culturally responsive pedagogy that can be used as a tool to interrupt this cycle and help end the failing schools and vulnerable outcomes for African American and Hispanic youth with disabilities.

## Theoretical Framework

Most of the research on African American and Hispanic youth assumes a deficit-based perspective (Nygren, 2006). For example, Bourdieu's (1977) contention that an individual's life experiences are generally predetermined by the family's socioeconomic and intellectual background parallels recent studies that have found that students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and whose parents did not graduate from high school also tend to not graduate (e.g., Fall & Roberts, 2012).

Recent dropout rates for children who live in families in the lowest income quartile have been reported at 13% compared to 2.3% for children of families in the highest quartile (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Although other data suggest that the achievement gap between the rich and poor is twice that of the achievement gap between White and African American children of similar socioeconomic status (Reardon, 2011), one must be cautious not to equate poverty with academic ineptness. As Blanchett et al. (2009) explain, students who live in poverty often attend insufficiently funded and under-resourced schools. These conditions often lead to school disengagement for many students.

Yosso (2002) proposed an alternative to theories that view socioeconomic background as the main contributor to school failure. Despite perceptions that generally attribute failure in school to low family socioeconomic background, other more powerful forms of cultural capital can counteract this effect. Yosso asserted that people's social standing (regardless of belonging to a lower socioeconomic stratum) and related experiences can actually help them achieve as opposed to hindering them. Specifically, Yosso's theory points toward the idea that each individual, including those in historically disenfranchised groups, possesses: (a) aspirational capital—maintaining dreams and aspirations; (b) linguistic capital—the intellectual skills that result from bilingualism or multilingualism; (c) familial capital—knowledge communicated via family history or personal stories; (d) social capital—networking and community resources; (e) navigational capital—ability to understand how societal institutions function; and (e) resistance capital—challenging and mobilizing against injustice.

Yosso's model focuses on the importance of community culture capital. At the core of this model are the experiences each student of color and/or with a disability brings into the learning context. In contrast with other Euro-centered forms of culture capital (e.g., Bourdieu's), these not only highlight the cultural wealth of the individual but also emphasize communal cultural relevancy and capital (Yosso, 2005). Culturally responsive special education upholds the same principles while incorporating the impact of disability status. Specifically, the aspirational tenet relates to maximizing the learners' potential while empowering them to become self-advocates. The social and linguistic tenets promote strategies to generalize pro-social behaviors that include appropriate formal and informal communication skills. The familial capital acknowledges the impact of the families' culture on how they interpret disability, as well as the importance of their *voices* on educational decisions. The navigational tenet focuses on academic accommodations or adaptations that help learners succeed and provide them with the ability to understand the processes and services related to special education. Lastly, resistance capital aims to help students thrive, despite the existing disability, with the ultimate goal being graduation and a career path.

By viewing student achievement through this lens, the school as an institution can now be used as a catalyst to assist students in using their heritage or disability status as a tool, rather than a vulnerability in achieving. Relatedly, based on a conceptual framework suggested by Bost (2006), schools are responsible for creating a climate that provides pro-social behaviors, academic success, highly qualified teachers, and effective transition services to potentially increase successful outcomes. To foster this school climate, teachers need to increase the likelihood that students have instructional and behavioral supports, as well as access to relevant content and quality instruction. Due to the complexity of the achievement gap phenomenon, it is necessary to explore the interactions of sociocultural and socioeconomic realities, particularly for African American and Hispanic students at risk for special education placement, in order to provide a more complete perspective and encourage deeper understandings.

The real question becomes: “How do we foster aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital in an environment that is oftentimes antagonistic to their very nature?” Jones and Vagle (2013) proposed a social class-sensitive pedagogy where the societal hierarchies are redefined through a more equitable lens. Under this type of pedagogy, the White middle class typically developing individual is no longer the standard to which all who do not measure up to are considered inferior. Accordingly, the five tenets of social-class sensitive pedagogy include: (a) analyzing educators’ and students’ experiences of class within broad social and political contexts; (b) locating and disrupting social classed hierarchies in schools and communities; (c) integrating social class and marginalized perspectives into curriculum; (d) perceiving classed bodies in moment-to-moment interactions with educators, students, and families; and (e) changing broader school and classroom policies and practices to reflect anti-classist and antipoverty commitment. Understanding the interaction of the theories presented and how they affect schooling within the current realities that exist can potentially lead toward progress in closing achievement and ultimately social-class gaps.

### **Current Realities**

Personal factors such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, language proficiency, engagement in school, and student behavior have continually been used to explain poor academic performance (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). However, to provide a more comprehensive solution, external factors must also be considered. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2012) has identified four broad categories of factors that work against adequate student achievement in school—the individual, family, school, and community.

#### **The Individual**

The lack of appropriate engagement in school, both academically (i.e., student’s readiness to learn) and socially (i.e., student’s relationship with teachers, school staff, and peers), indicates withdrawal. Engagement reflects the student’s identification with school, learning and fitting in (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2008). Gradual disengagement from the school’s culture due to lack of involvement in school activities can begin as early as first grade for students experiencing academic and behavioral difficulties (Schoeneberger, 2012). Hispanic students, for example, often feel a sense of not belonging because of the cultural incongruence between the Hispanic

culture and White middle-class culture of most schools (Rodriguez, 2012). Language barriers often contribute to isolation from both peers and teachers. Similarly, African American students who use African American Vernacular English, a legitimate American dialect (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2003), to communicate often find themselves isolated within the classroom, seated farthest from the teacher, called on less frequently than other students, and often receiving more negative criticism and less praise than their peers (Ford, 2011).

Students with disabilities are particularly at risk for poor academic performance. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2011), approximately 6.6 million students in the United States are identified as having a disability and approximately 22% of those students will drop out of school before graduating. The IQ-achievement discrepancy model (also known as the wait-to-fail model) typically associated with special education, where students first have to underperform in order to receive the necessary educational interventions, suggests that students with disabilities are put at risk early in their educational lives (McNamara, Scissons, & Gutknecht, 2011). Students with disabilities may be years behind in core subjects (Impecoven-Lind & Foegen, 2010). If these students do not receive support during the early years, it is likely they will never catch up (McNamara et al., 2011). African American students with a disability are at a higher risk than their White peers to be placed in restrictive school environments leading to feelings of social isolation, lower self-esteem, and increased risk of dropping out (Raines, Dever, Kamphaus, & Roach, 2012). Moreover, once students are placed in special education classes, they are likely to never be exited and therefore stay in special education, which risks limiting their access to a rigorous curriculum and a post-secondary education (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011).

The lack of appropriate engagement in school, both academically and socially, indicates withdrawal. Engagement reflects the student's identification with school, learning, and fitting in (Pyle & Wexler, 2012). Because of cultural differences, minority students often experience a feeling of loss of identity and motivation while attending schools where the majority of the students are of a different race or ethnic group. Having a disability makes the education experience even more difficult since having a disability often adds socialization skills that are different and at times inappropriate. Children with disabilities often lack the cooperation and self-control skills needed to interact with other students and teachers, which can lead to difficult relations, especially with peers. Being victimized or rejected by peers can have negative effects on motivation and school engagement (Milsom & Glanville, 2010).

Hope, Chavous, Jagers, and Sellers (2013) found that positive racial group identification can strengthen the connections between self-esteem and achievement. In their study of Mexican American high school students, Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) found cultural pride and awareness to be significant predictors of academic resilience. Over a decade later, Dotterer, McHale and Crouter (2009) found that ethnic identity had a positive effect on socio-cultural factors and school engagement of African American adolescents. Students who have higher levels of ethnic and racial group identity tend to report higher levels of school engagement compared to students who have lower levels of ethnic and racial group identity (Dotterer et al., 2009). However, Hope et al. found that for African American students, the relationship between racial group identification, self-esteem, and academic achievement is inconsistent. Identification with a



stigmatized group, due to historical and contemporary racism or disability status, can put these students at risk for academic failure. Students who internalize negative views of their group could experience lower than average academic performance. Group identification also may be linked to disengagement in other ways. African American students who recognize that economic and social barriers exist for their group may come to feel that education is not the route to upward mobility (Butler-Barnes, Williams, & Chavous, & 2012).

## **The Family**

Family factors have also been the focus of urban education research in an attempt to find the causes of low academic achievement. Low achieving students tend to have parents who are not involved in their education or their lives (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox, 2010), and they often live in poverty in families headed by a female who is single (Saatcioglu, 2010). Because of socioeconomic hardships, families may have a survival-oriented approach rather than a child centered approach to child rearing. The need for daily survival may work against family involvement in the child's education because caregivers may be less available to spend quality time with their children (Ford, 2011). Furthermore, these families may not have the resources needed (e.g., books) to create a stimulating environment. When parent/caregiver presence is low, children are generally left alone to make choices for themselves; and unsupervised children may spend their time participating in activities that are not school related, causing them to fall behind (Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009). For children with disabilities, economic and social hardships can translate into a decreased likelihood that parents will be able to help their children overcome the disability because there are fewer resources for treatment. Therefore, students with a low socioeconomic status and a disability find that the interaction of these two factors intensifies the negative effect of each factor thereby deterring the student from completing high school (Hughes & Avoke, 2010).

Immigrant status may also play a role in parent/family involvement in a child's education (Davis-Kean & Sexton, 2009). For example, with first generation Hispanic students, the lack of parental involvement is often due to the parents' limited English language proficiency. These students are more likely than any other ethnic group to come from a home where the parents do not speak English and where the level of parental education is low, making it difficult for the parents to assist with academic tasks. The low parental education that is often typical of immigrants arriving from developing countries makes it difficult for these parents to navigate the school system to get help for their child when needed (Gándara, 2010). Social and cultural values influence beliefs and awareness of what constitutes typical development and may, for example, lead to a lack of knowledge of which services are available to children with disabilities (Banerjee & Luckner, 2014).

It is important to note that the identification of risk factors is not enough to predict poor academic achievement or special education identification. Despite the presence of challenges in their daily lives, many students persevere and succeed. A close tie exists between positive academic outcomes and academic support from family, friends, and teachers (Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, & Royer, 2009). Specifically, at-risk students who succeed academically have family members that understand and express the value of school and to the child. Often, these students have positive relationships with parents who closely monitor their friendships and

academic performance. Accordingly, these children generally avoid deviant peers and have high self-esteem. When faced with difficult teachers or difficult tasks, these students are convinced that they can succeed (Murray & Naranjo, 2008) and are willing to advocate for themselves in school and seek the help and support of an adult when they need it (Lessard et al., 2009).

Harry and Klingner (2006) suggested that tapping into family strengths is central to a child's educational experience, especially for children with a disability, and they warn against negative biases that might cause educators to view family involvement through narrow, stereotypical criteria. Kalyanpur and Harry (2012) explained the need for cultural reciprocity when working with parents, and the need to identify incongruencies between families' expectations of education, outcomes, and involvement for their children with disabilities and the expectations of many school professionals. Similarly, Sheldon, Epstein and Galindo (2010) called on teachers and schools to make a concerted effort to create high quality partnership practices with families in order to reach important school goals, such as improved student motivation to learn. Supportive activities that involve parents with children and teachers can create a partnership climate capable of increasing student proficiency. Low income and CLD families often become both the victims of and accountable for the circumstances of their children, with educators and schools being exonerated of their negative roles and impact. Yet, it is the school and the classroom that set the socio-emotional tone for learning (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

## **The School**

The public school structure in the United States reflects White, middle class values and norms. Educators interpret the performance and behavior of low-income and CLD students through parameters of what competence and proper behavior should look like (Rodriguez, 2012). However, the values and norms that make up these parameters are not always aligned with those of low income and CLD students and their families (Klingner et al., 2005). If students' performance and behaviors do not align with these parameters, their performances are often regarded as deficient and their behaviors as inappropriate.

Schools are seen as the vehicle that ensures upward social mobility (Harry & Klingner, 2006). Yet, because of inequitable funding, low expectations, and curricula differentiated along social-class lines and according to ability/disability (Oakes, 2010), upward mobility fails to become a reality for many students. Harry and Klingner assert that school quality can be identified in terms of effective or ineffective administrative decision-making, instruction, discipline policies, parent/school personnel interactions, and teacher quality. Schools that lack essential materials are dirty, overcrowded, and unsafe. These schools are common in low-income neighborhoods or are often in neighborhoods with high concentrations of Hispanic and African American families (Oakes, 2010). High poverty schools in Black neighborhoods tend to fair worse than high poverty schools in Hispanic neighborhoods (Harry & Klingner, 2006).

Moreover, low-income and CLD students are more likely than their White counterparts to attend schools that are inadequately funded and staffed. Teachers in these schools tend to be less experienced and have fewer qualifications and advanced degrees than teachers who work in middle and high-income neighborhoods (Balfanz et al., 2010). Also, due to the lack of experience, these teachers have inadequate instructional and classroom management skills. The

quality of education they provide is inadequate and they spend more time on behavioral issues than on instruction (Ford, 2011).

Furthermore, inadequate disciplinary procedures are also problematic because they can lead to excessive reliance on zero tolerance policies (Gonsoulin, Zablocki, & Leone, 2012). Although these policies were initially enacted to keep schools free of drugs and protect the school environment from threats of violence (Fuentes, 2012), these policies are often used to deal with misconduct that would have simply landed students from earlier generations in the principal's office.

While schools with large minority, low-income populations are more likely to have zero tolerance policies than schools in affluent neighborhoods (Fuentes, 2012), unfortunately these policies sometimes lead to high levels of out of school suspensions and expulsions, which in turn can lead to a cycle of students falling behind and not being able to catch up. This can subsequently translate into student disengagement and even school dropout (Brownstein, 2010).

Zero tolerance policies disproportionately target African-American and Hispanic students as well as students with disabilities, particularly those with emotional and/or behavioral disorders (McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). Research has shown that African-American students are three times more likely to be suspended, and three and a half times more likely to be expelled when compared to White students; whereas, Hispanic students are one and a half times more likely to be suspended and twice as likely as their White peers to be expelled (Brownstein, 2010). While students with disabilities, make up 11% to 14% of the total student population, they make up 20% to 24% of the number of students suspended or expelled (Williams, Pazey, Shelby, & Yates, 2013).

Additionally, schools in low-income areas are often large, overcrowded, and more bureaucratic and hierarchical with impersonal relationships than schools in higher income neighborhoods; interactions between students and teachers are reduced; and the environment is often intimidating (Rodriguez, 2012) or unwelcoming, making both students and parents feel like they do not belong in the school (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012). Researchers have called for policies and practices that lead to stronger schools in low-income neighborhoods in which the teachers in them convey the message that high academic expectations and respect for individual differences are characteristics of the school's culture (Ford, 2011; Harry & Klingner, 2006). That is, culturally responsive schools that instill ethics of care, respect, and responsibility provide low-income and CLD students with access to a high quality, dignified and meaningful education (Jones & Vagle, 2013).

## **The Community**

Many studies of academic performance do not take into consideration the community. Benson and Borman (2010) assert that equalizing achievement among students from different social and racial/ethnic backgrounds is virtually impossible if the neighborhood conditions in which children grow up are not taken into account. They contend that schools inherit the inequalities of their neighborhood contexts because students tend to go to their neighborhood schools and as a result, mirror the socioeconomic, racial and ethnic makeup of the surrounding neighborhood.

Further, Benson and Boraman noted that when students from a lower socioeconomic status (SES) attend middle SES schools, it tends to boost their achievement and educational outcomes. If policymakers want to improve high poverty neighborhoods and schools they need to replicate the advantages present in socially advantaged neighborhoods and schools—i.e., high quality teachers with effective instructional and classroom management skills and adequate resources such as up-to-date textbooks (Benson & Borman, 2010).

Taking into consideration the community in which the teacher lives may also shed light on the situations that place children at risk for academic failure. The vast majority of teachers are White middle-class females, with approximately 15% being CLD (this includes all CLD groups combined); and of the total number with only about 1.2% Black males (Ford, 2011). These numbers raise concerns about the cultural competence of the educators teaching low-income and CLD students (Ford, 2011). In essence, low-income and CLD students are being educated by teachers who do not share their socioeconomic and racial/ethnic or cultural background, which often forces these students to face pressures not shared by students who are of the same race and cultural background as the teacher (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008). Furthermore, most curricula tend to reflect a White middle-class English-speaking perspective (Rodriguez, 2012). Failure on the part of teachers to address or value their students' primary culture could be a significant factor in the student's underachievement (Cohen-Vogel, Goldring, & Smrekar, 2010).

### **Proposing a Solution Model**

Given the established concerns surrounding the educational vulnerabilities for African American and Hispanic youth with disabilities and the current realities present in individuals, families, schools, and communities, we must consider exploring effective practices that can be applied in multiple contexts. If we choose to view the achievement disparities through a lens of opportunity for education rather than circumstances as pre-determined by context, we can empower African American and Hispanic students with disabilities to leverage their cultural capital. One tool that has long been recommended for effectively educating this population is culturally responsive teaching (CRT, Gay, 2002, 2010). CRT encompasses many of the guiding principles found in Yosso's theory of building on the unique strengths and social capitals that diverse families possess. Based on this perspective, if we allow students from typically disenfranchised groups to influence and shape instruction, they can achieve educational capital as well. The success of cultural infusion within the context of learning is largely dependent on positioning the individual experiences within the context of larger social phenomena. African American and Hispanic students with disabilities are typically in powerless positions due to achievement gaps, school failure, and subsequent outcomes.

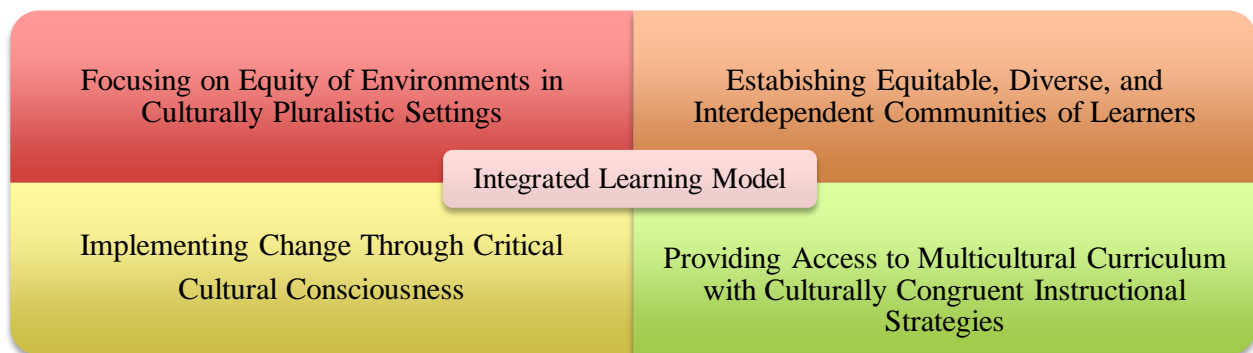
Similarly, inclusive service delivery models examine the environment, equity of opportunity, and access to appropriate educational settings. Frattura and Capper (2006) developed an integrated comprehensive services model focusing on equity of access to education for students with disabilities. By merging principles of inclusivity, access, and cultural responsiveness; and by linking to the current realities that many African American and Hispanic youth with disabilities encounter within the families, schools, and communities in which they grow up, we must develop a social-class sensitive pedagogy that takes into account these socio-economic realities

that are the culture of these populations. Only then, can equitable and culturally relevant approaches be utilized as a potential solution to closing the achievement gap and placing these students in a role of power where they can ultimately become responsible and empowered to make personal changes to improve their circumstances.

### **Integrated Learning Model**

A combination of the previous approaches to culturally responsive teaching and inclusive service delivery models can ideally provide a model that facilitates equal access to quality instruction and learning for all students. Figure 1 shows the integrated learning model that we developed, which incorporates and expands the work of Gay (2002, 2010) and Frattura and Capper (2006) by infusing their components with social-class sensitive pedagogy (Jones & Vagle, 2013) to provide equity in education for at-risk students.

**Figure 1. Integrated Learning Model**



*Note: This model infuses elements of Gay's (2002, 2010) components of culturally responsive teaching and Frattura and Capper's (2006) integrated comprehensive services model.*

As depicted, the proposed model addresses various school-related constructs that affect the learning potential of students, particularly African American and Hispanic students, with documented risk for negative educational outcomes or potential dropout. This model can potentially facilitate integrated quality instruction, promote student learning, and increase academic potential and continued school engagement.

*Focusing on equity of environments in culturally pluralistic settings.* The first tenet of the integrated learning model involves designing inclusive classrooms where all students, including those with disabilities, are valued and made to feel like an integral part of the classroom culture. All students receive purposeful and meaningful learning opportunities from qualified teachers regardless of their socioeconomic background, ability level, or family circumstance.

Equity of classroom environments should not be differentiated based upon the socioeconomic status of the community in which the school is located. High expectations for academic achievement should exist for all students, even those with learning and/or behavioral challenges. The focus should be on finding ways to support student success within the classroom, rather than turning towards exclusionary practices such as suspensions, expulsions, or referrals to segregated

settings. Exposure to peers who are academically oriented is especially important in schools where student achievement tends to be low and can lead to greater connectedness to schools, which can be a predictor of decreased dropout, even at an early age (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012). This tenet of the model can strengthen student bonds and engagement.

*Establishing equitable, diverse, and interdependent communities of learners.* The second tenet is a continuation of the first tenet. It provides the framework for setting up equitable relationships between students within classroom environments.

Within the context of culturally responsive teaching as supported by Gay (2002, 2010), teachers must facilitate collaborative and cooperative classroom structures where students can rely on each other as members of a community of learners. Students must be accountable for the progress and success of each other as a team. When students value the cultural capital that each contributes to the team and encourage each other to use these as strengths in achieving common goals, academic achievement and prosocial behaviors increase (Wentzel, McNamara-Barry, & Caldwell, 2004).

*Implementing change through critical cultural consciousness.* This tenet involves implementing change in specific practices such as teachers confronting their own biases as related to language, culture, socioeconomic status, or disability label(s) of students. These biases must also be explored among the students towards each other.

Once all members of the class are viewed through a lens of respect and equal rights to be full members of the class, the types of interactions that occur between teachers and students should change. This leads to higher levels of positive peer norms and positive ethnic identity, both of which have been associated with increased student engagement (Shin, Daly, & Vera, 2007). This also leads to a reduction in the removal of students with disabilities from the general education classroom and a decrease in teaching students in contrived situations, such as segregated resource rooms, that teach concepts in isolation with little or no contextual reference (Frattura & Capper, 2006).

*Providing access to multicultural curriculum with culturally congruent instructional strategies.* The final tenet of the proposed integrated learning model addresses the classroom environment with the idea that in order to truly facilitate integrated quality instruction, teachers must be highly qualified in their subject areas; the content must be culturally relevant; and the teachers must be skilled in designing their instruction so that it is tailored to be compatible with learners who bring various abilities, skill sets, and learning styles to the classroom. The curriculum recognizes and values the family and community experience each student brings to the class via their respective cultural capitals. As such, the curriculum must include components that empower students to become anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-poverty, and pro-positive social change agents as an imperative to support the academic success of all members of the classroom.

## Conclusion

The larger theoretical implications of cultural marginalization have resulted in systemic practices that viewed those who were not part of the dominant ethnic class as disenfranchised outsiders.

While creating sustainable answers to the long-standing questions surrounding cultural capital can take years, some educational models have begun the re-structuring process. And, given the negative impact of overrepresentation and the mis-education of African American and Hispanic youth, it seems fitting that culturally responsive models be implemented to close the achievement gap and put an end to the failure of schools in appropriately serving students with the greatest need for education.

For culturally responsive models to work, they must focus on the student's immediate environment as the catalyst for sustainable change. Given the impact of culture on perceptions, these models must also be sensitive to the student's social class and disability status. The answer to upward mobility and academic success does not lie in maligning the student's current social strata as something to "get out of" but rather something to propel the student forward.

The deficit-based perspective where African American and Hispanic students with disabilities are depicted as plagued by their own circumstances must be replaced with one that uses their comprehensive environment as a catalyst towards education equity and intellectual emancipation. The proposed integrated learning model, which is based on a broader, more inclusive definition of culture within the context of education, may be a successful tool for addressing the needs of the increasingly diverse student population in today's schools.

#### AUTHOR NOTES

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## **Working with Twice-Exceptional African American Students: Information for School Counselors**

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This qualitative study examined the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of eight twice-exceptional African American gifted students who attended the same K-12 urban school district in the Midwest. Four major themes emerged—academic supports, personal and social challenges, career worries, and experience with school counselors. Findings revealed that students’ special education status negatively impacted their relationship with peers, educators, and school counselors. Further, students struggled in developing a positive sense of self. Recommendations for school counselors are included.

*Keywords:* African American, twice-exceptional, school counselors, gifted

The topic of “twice-exceptional”, meaning gifted while having a disability, has received increased attention in recent years (Assouline, Foley Nicpon, & Whiteman, 2010; Trail, 2011). With the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), children with disabilities who are gifted and talented were recognized as a special population in need of additional supports. Despite federal recognition of twice-exceptional students, schools have faced challenges in properly identifying and serving these students. Currently, it is estimated that between 2% and 7% of the special education population are twice-exceptional (Trail, 2011). However, understanding the definitive prevalence of twice-exceptionality becomes increasingly difficult, as there are many challenges with identification. For example, twice-exceptional students may only be identified for one exceptionality or for no exceptionality, thus leaving twice-exceptional students underidentified and underserved (Foley Nicpon, Allmon, Sieck, & Stinson, 2011).

Additionally, the identification of twice-exceptional students greatly depends upon the expertise and competence of educators. Several studies suggest that when faced with identifying twice-exceptional students, educators were more likely to recognize students’ disabilities despite the student demonstrating exceptional talent (Bianco, 2005; Hartnett, Nelson, & Rinn, 2003; Rinn & Nelson, 2009). This could likely be due to their perceptions about giftedness and disability. Some may believe that gifted students do not require special interventions, are equally talented in other subjects, and/or do not have disabilities (Assouline, Foley Nicpon, & Huber, 2006). When

Foley-Nicpon and colleagues (2013) investigated educators' understanding of twice-exceptionality, gifted education, and special education; they found that while all educators reported a high level of familiarity with twice-exceptionality and how it can manifest, most were less familiar with state guidelines for special education, gifted education, and Response to Intervention (RtI) as a model for gifted education services (Foley-Nicpon, Assouline, Colangelo, 2013). Moreover, 40.3% of the educators believed that the gifted education specialist would be the best choice for providing support to students, followed by the classroom teacher (17.8%), special education teacher (14.1%), parent (7.0%), psychologist (3.4%), school counselor (3.4%), and school administrator (0.3%).

Once identified as twice-exceptional, students may face a myriad of challenges in their efforts to be successful. First, twice-exceptional students experience both strengths and vulnerabilities as a result of the intersection of their disability and giftedness. This intersection may cause them to struggle as they try to understand their unique identities (Assouline Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; Williams King, 2005). It may also create challenges in the classroom in finding instructional strategies to help them reach their potential. More specifically, Willard-Holt and colleagues (2013) found that twice-exceptional students felt that their schools failed to help them reach their academic potential. These students believe they had to learn how to use their own strengths to overcome their weaknesses. Moreover, students may experience feelings of low self-esteem, self-doubt, and frustration, and thus they may exhibit more disruptive or problem behaviors making it more challenging to maintain social relationships and succeed in school (Assouline, Foley-Nicpon, & Doobay, 2009; Williams King, 2005).

While current literature provides insight on twice-exceptionality, gaps still exist in understanding within group diversity. For example, a comprehensive review of the literature on twice-exceptionality yielded few studies that incorporated the experiences and perspectives of twice-exceptional students of color. Additionally, most twice-exceptionality studies focus on students with intellectual giftedness or giftedness in specific content areas like math, science, or reading. While these studies present valuable information, they may lack generalizability to the greater twice-exceptional student population, including students of color and those who are gifted in non-academic areas such as art, music, and dance.

In addition to the lack of literature on diversity within the twice-exceptional population, there is less literature regarding the role of school counselors in supporting twice-exceptional students. Given the challenges in identifying and supporting twice-exceptional students, it is important that educators, including school counselors, recognize their role in promoting the success of twice-exceptional students. School counselors, in particular, play a critical role in the development of students' academic, social, and career/college outcomes (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012; Chen-Hayes, Ockerman, & Mason, 2013). Specifically, school counselors are responsible for assisting students in the personal/social domain and they have an obligation to collaborate with other educational stakeholders in developing educational plans, as well as consulting and advocating for student success. In other words, school counselors are the leaders for bringing teachers, administrators, and parents together for one common goal—academic achievement for “all” students. Further, social justice permeates the role of a school counselor. They have a responsibility to seek community resources to assist students, use data to determine barriers to student learning, and advocate for educational equity in school curricula (The Education Trust, 2009). Given the mandate by the U.S. Federal Government for education reform and accountability, school counselors must lead by using their

skill sets to empower students to succeed as well as close achievement, attainment, and opportunity gaps (The Education Trust, 2009).

Moreover, school counselors are responsible for developing a comprehensive counseling program within their schools to meet the needs of every student. The most well known school counseling program is the ASCA National Model. The ASCA National Model is an excellent tool for systematically accessing and addressing the needs of African American students who are considered twice-exceptional. This program consists of the following components: (a) foundation, (b) delivery, (c) management, and (d) accountability. The foundation component guides the school counselor's beliefs and vision for student success in addition to using ASCA competencies to facilitate student development. Also, school counselors create a mission statement that aligns with the school and district's mission statement for goal setting and later measuring whether those same goals are met (ASCA, 2012). The delivery component, requires school counselors to provide services such as academic individual planning with students, individual and group counseling (i.e., counseling, psychoeducational, and psychotherapy), developing and implementing a core curriculum, meeting student needs, and collaborating with stakeholders to ensure academic success and positive post-secondary outcomes. The management component requires school counselors to use assessments and data tools to not only measure the success of the counseling program but also to evaluate the effectiveness of school counselors and the services provided. Lastly, the accountability component determines the impact of the school counseling program on academic achievement and other success indicators that produce positive outcomes for students.

Additionally, school counselors are charged with providing services for all students (ASCA, 2012), including African American twice-exceptional students. However, research on how school counselors can assist African American twice-exceptional students is lacking. From our review of the literature, we found only one article (i.e., Assouline, Nicpon, & Huber, 2006) that emphasized the need for school counselors to understand how to work with African American twice-exceptional students, particularly in regards to advocacy and support. The paucity of studies on this population highlights the gap that exists and the need for information about how to effectively provide counseling services to African American students labeled as twice-exceptional. The purpose of this article is to share our understanding of the perceptions and experiences of twice-exceptional African American students and their interactions with school counselors; and, to provide recommendations for more effectively identifying strategies that can be used by school counselors to better serve this population. The specific research questions were:

1. How do students experience their intersecting identities (gifted, special needs, race) in K-12 schools?
2. How have students interacted with school counselors throughout their K-12 schooling?

## **Methodology**

### *Participants and Recruitment*

The participants in this study were selected from a pool of 118 African American twice-exceptional high school students located in a large urban district in the midwestern region of the

United States. While the students were gifted in academic and non-academic areas, the majority (86%) was gifted in non-academic areas. Because of the lack of literature on twice-exceptional students in non-academic areas and the prevalence of these students in this particular school district, we recruited twice-exceptional African American students with non-academic gifts.

Each of the students was previously identified by the school district using standards and procedures for both special and gifted education. Students identified for special education were evaluated by the district using procedures in alignment with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Students identified as being gifted in non-academic areas (e.g., art, music, dance) were first nominated for gifted education by a visual or performing arts specialist at the school. Once nominated, behavioral checklists and performance assessments were completed via student performance or portfolio work. Families of students who were tested were notified of gifted status via U.S. mail.

The school district provided the researchers with a list of all identified twice-exceptional African American high school students. One of the researchers then worked with principals and school counselors to contact students and invite them to a recruitment session at their respective high schools. Potential participants were provided information about the study as well as consent documents to be completed by parents and submitted to the researcher during a second session at their respective high school. Once consent forms were collected, semi-structured individual interviews were arranged to gather in-depth understanding of their experiences.

A total of eight students (5 females, 3 males) participated in the study with disabilities ranging from specific learning disabilities (5, 62.5%) and emotional disorders (2, 25%) to traumatic brain injury (1, 12.5%). The students were also identified for gifted education in non-academic subject areas, including instrumental music (2, 25%), vocal music (2, 25%), dance (3, 37.5%), and visual-spatial (1, 12.5%). See Table 1 for student demographics.

### *Data Collection*

Two forms of data collection were used—a demographic questionnaire and a 30 to 90 minute individual semi-structured interview (Patton, 2002). The demographic questionnaire included information about family background (e.g., parent education level, siblings, community make-up) as well as educational information (e.g., extracurricular activities, college and career goals, grade point average). A general interview guide for the semi-structured interviews was created based on the researchers' experiences in education and the review of the literature. Questions were added, subtracted, or modified based on the responses of the participants before and during the interview to allow for systematic, comprehensive interviewing (Patton, 2002). The interview questions focused on students' understanding of their giftedness and special needs (e.g., When did you learn that you are gifted/had special needs? How were you included in that process? What does it mean to you to have that label?) as well as questions regarding race (e.g., What is it like to be African American in your school? Best part? Worst part?). Additionally, questions addressed experiences in school, including their interactions with teachers and school counselors (e.g., In what ways have teachers/school counselors been a source of support? How have they been unsupportive?) as well as questions regarding how school staff and programs could be more supportive or helpful (e.g., How can school be more helpful to you? What do you need the most from your teachers/school counselors? How can they be more helpful?)

**TABLE 1**  
**Student Demographics**

<b>Student Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Special Education ID</b>	<b>Gifted Education ID</b>	<b>GPA</b>	<b>School Size</b>	<b>Free and/or Reduced Meals</b>
Amber	F	15	9	SLD	Instrumental Music	77-82	699	84.7%
Chelby	F	14	9	ED	Dance	77-82	607	87.5%
Darnell	M	16	10	TBI	Instrumental Music	< 77	1000	76.8%
Karin	F	17	12	SLD	Dance	87-92	728	86.9%
Luisa	F	16	10	ED	Vocal Music	< 77	728	86.9%
Riley	F	17	12	SLD	Vocal Music	83-86	554	88.3%
Trey	M	19	12	SLD	Visual-Spatial	83-86	681	81.3%
Zero	M	17	12	SLD	Dance	83-86	728	86.9%



## *Data Analysis*

A grounded theory approach was used to understand data from the participants' individual interviews. The data was analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This strategy involves collecting and analyzing data simultaneous to develop conceptual categories that illustrate the relationship between data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Thorne, 2000). Responses to each interview item were sorted and compared across participants. Emergent themes and categories were then tested to build and clarify categories as well as identify the variations within categories (Charmaz, 2001). To ensure trustworthiness of data, the researchers used member checking to solicit feedback from the participants on the categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This feedback was used to further refine the categories and to report an account of the feedback that "closely approximates the reality it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

## **Data Presentation**

In keeping with the nature of grounded theory, in-depth descriptions are presented to illustrate the school experiences of students (Patton, 2002). These experiences were divided into four general categories—academic supports, personal and social challenges, career worries, and experiences with school counselors.

### **Category 1: Academic Supports**

All of the students discussed the tremendous amount of academic challenges that they faced in the school setting, which primarily related to their disability as identified in their individualized education plan (IEP). Each student reported that despite having their needs documented in the IEP, teachers and other school staff often overlooked the accommodations they needed. For example, Riley felt like her IEP tutor would "take advantage" of her because the tutor thought she was slow. This caused many disagreements between the two and ultimately led Riley to avoid the support that she needed. Similarly, Darnell shared that his IEP tutor was less than understanding of his needs related to his traumatic brain injury (TBI). His tutor would often chastise him by saying "you make me look bad. You need to come to school more" despite Darnell's physical challenges related to his disability, which made it difficult for him to come to school some days. Other students talked about their perception that classroom teachers in that they felt that teachers "assumed every student was the same there, and they all did the same work," which often meant students' unique needs were not being met.

In addition to lack of accommodations, each student expressed the general rudeness and lack of connection they experienced from teachers, which created an even greater disconnect for students who yearned for a personal connection with their teachers. Louisa felt like there was an overall communication breakdown: "[they were] not trying to get to know me, not trying to get to know what I like to do, not even trying to contact my parents whatsoever telling them how well I'm doing or if I'm doing bad or anything good."

Despite these challenges, the students talked about a desire to be successful as well as individuals in the school that could support their efforts. The students were also aware that they played a part in their own success. They knew they needed to "go to class everyday," do their best, and be

intentional with whom they associate. Additionally, the students knew that they needed to have confidence in their own abilities to do the work. All of the students identified at least one individual in the school that they perceived as supportive of their academics. For example, Zero felt that his teachers were “very motivated” in helping him get to the next step in his education and eventually be successful in securing a job. Like many of the other participants, Chelby described her relationship with a teacher, as feeling like she’s one of the teacher’s kids. Chelby believed that this teacher looked after her at school and did everything in her power to help her pass the ninth grade, including advocating for her needs in and outside of the classroom.

## **Category 2: Personal and Social Challenges**

Interestingly, many of the students’ social and personal experiences have been related to their special needs. In fact, five of the participants did not know they were identified as gifted prior to their participation in this study. When the researchers discussed their gifted identities, all five participants expressed conflicting views of their gifted label as designated by the district and how they believed they were gifted. For example, Karin was identified as being gifted in dance; however, she thought that was “a complete lie...[she didn’t] know who said that.” Darnell, Chelby, and Trey were the only students who knew that they were gifted prior to the start of this study. Despite most of the participants’ lack of knowledge of the district’s identification of their giftedness, all 8 students liked being called gifted. They all felt “happy” and “unique” because of the label. They believed that being gifted was something to be shared with everyone.

While being gifted was new to the students, each were aware of their special education status. Many of the students received special education services in special education classes, pull out supports in the resource room, or extra tutoring. They expressed feeling “low,” “dumb,” and “stupid” when they learned that they had special needs. Moreover, the students expressed their frustration with keeping their special needs a secret while at the same time feeling isolated at school. For example Riley, who was placed in special education classes, felt “segregated” in her classes but made a great effort to keep her needs a secret by “stay[ing] in the back” of class as to limit the attention drawn to her. Although all students had concerns about their peers knowing about their disability, they also wanted genuine connections with their classmates.

In addition to negative perceptions of their special education status, seven of the eight students shared that they were often bullied or teased by their peers, which in turn impacted their behavior at school. Chelby said she would often skip or be tardy when going to the resource room to avoid her peers because they “think it’s the slow class...and ask ‘did ya’ll eat your cheerios today?’ ” Amber expressed that doing something wrong at her school meant that “everybody will talk about you,” which contributed to her isolating herself from her peers and maintaining a very small circle of friends.

While their special education label seemed to create a number of personal and social challenges, students found strength in their cultural identities. For example, several students expressed solidarity with other students because of the majority of African American students in attendance. Three students spoke specifically of their pride in their cultural background and how it has shaped them. Karin believed that being Jamaican American provided her with morals and standards and felt like she would have “turned out differently” had her grandmother not raised

her. Although students felt pride, they also realized that they faced stereotypes both within the school and in the larger society. For example, Darnell believed that his intersecting identities of being black and having TBI led teachers to stereotype him as “another black, lazy kid” when he had difficulties related to his TBI. Similarly, Zero’s lack of athleticism generated a lot of stereotypical conversations about his blackness. Both Karin and Trey saw that being African American or Jamaican American had larger implications in society in how they might be treated. For instance, Trey realized that the media portrays African Americans in a negative light, which causes him to get upset. However, he is able to reframe these portrayals as the media’s lack of understanding about African Americans.

### **Category 3: Career Worries**

All eight of the students expressed great interest in their postsecondary futures. Each student wanted to pursue more education either in trade school or college. For example, Trey was encouraged by his teachers to go to trade school where he could link his visual giftedness to a career in carpentry. Chelby wanted to let her gift shine in her career goal of becoming a professional dancer after studying dance and choreography at a university. With all of their postsecondary aspirations, six of the students expressed concerns about their ability to be successful in school and in college. Prior to enrolling in high school, both Luisa and Amber shared that they were worried about the transition and what it would entail to have an IEP. They were worried that high school would be too difficult and that teachers would not be as helpful. The three male participants worried about their ability to be successful in their courses due to their respective disability. For example, Zero often felt like he fell behind in school and that he had “constant headaches, mainly [due to] confusion on what [he] was doing.” Similarly, Trey felt worried because he “really can’t read,” despite his best efforts to overcome his disability. After Darnell’s traumatic brain injury, he worried about his ability to still be smart, but he “knew things would be different because of the plans [IEP] that were being made.” On the other hand, Karin, a senior, was gravely concerned about her ability to be successful in community college. She was concerned that her professors would think she was “dumb” and that they wouldn’t accommodate her needs.

### **Category 5: Experience with School Counselors**

All of the participants had limited interactions with their school counselors, and only three had some positive experiences. Zero was the only student who had consistent experiences with school counselors throughout his K-12 education. For him, school counselors were “really motivated and set goals for you. Sometimes you think like they’re way too high goals and once you actually get there you’re like that was really easy.” Although Amber and Karin did not have interactions with a school counselor until high school, both felt like their high school counselor supported them, and “helped [them] through a lot of things.”

Being a senior also played a role in the students’ interaction with the counselor. For example, Karin, Riley, and Trey worked with the school counselor to monitor their grades to make sure they were making adequate progress for graduation. However, Riley thought her school counselor hindered her progress towards graduation due to lack of communication. She

explained that her school counselor “tells [her] stuff late” and one miscommunication led to her cumulative GPA dropping.

## Discussion

As previously stated, research on twice-exceptionality and how school counselors can support twice-exceptional students is limited. Within the limited literature on twice-exceptionality, no study was identified that focused specifically on the experiences of twice-exceptional African American students in schools and their interactions with school counselors. The lack of information about these students may negatively impact the ability of professionals to service the educational needs of twice exceptional African American students.

Provided the district identified all students in the sample, the students did not experience the challenges related to masking (Foley Nicpon et al., 2011). However, because of district policy, 7 out of the 8 students were not involved in the gifted program at their school, thus seeing their school experiences through the lens of having a disability. Most challenges experienced were those related to securing supports and services from educators related to their IEPs (Petersen, 2009). Students felt that they were constantly faced with educators who did not follow their IEPs and communicated low expectations, rudeness, and hostility towards them. Interestingly, Darnell did have experience in the gifted program but after the onset of his TBI, he struggled with securing the appropriate supports for his special needs. These findings suggest that while educators may be more likely to see the student’s disability (Bianco, 2005; Hartnett, Nelson, & Rinn, 2004; Rinn & Nelson, 2009), they may need additional training to adequately meet students special needs to ensure their academic success.

Although students did not have to negotiate their special needs with their gifted status (Assouline Nicpon, & Huber, 2006; Williams King, 2005), they did struggle to develop a positive sense of self, often feeling dumb or stupid (Willard-Holt et al., 2013) as a result of their disability. Moreover, students’ cultural background was important. While students drew strength from their cultural background they also felt that they had to combat stereotypes and negative messages in their school and society as a whole. This finding, in particular, extends the current twice-exceptionality literature, which has not addressed the intersection of culture with disability and giftedness. Given the limited exposure and experience of giftedness, these students experienced school much like African American students in special education (DeValenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006). Students often experienced a mismatch between their learning environments and found themselves in hostile and negative social situations with peers, ultimately affecting their self-esteem (Waitoller, Artilles, & Cheney, 2010). If students are able to build positive identities (i.e., cultural, academic, ability), they are more likely to be resilient in the face of negativity and be successful (Moore, Madison-Colmore, & Smith, 2003; Petersen, 2009).

It is encouraging that students were able to find at least one individual in their school experience that could support them. Most described teachers whom they were able to build a relationship with and who supported them in and outside of the classroom. Only one student, Amber, described the school counselor as a support. Other students had limited experiences with school counselors despite the numerous challenges they faced in their academic, personal and social, and career development. The lack of interaction with school counselors is particularly interesting

as school counselors are advocates in schools, working both with students, parents, and educators to create an environment where all students can be successful (ASCA, 2012; Assouline et al., 2009). This lack of interaction with school counselors suggests that students may not understand the role of schools counselors. Likewise, the lack of interaction may indicate that school counselors may have limited opportunity and skills to adequately address the needs of this population.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this study have the potential to assist educators, especially school counselors, better support the success of twice-exceptional African American students K-12 schools. Given the schooling experiences of twice-exceptional African American students, we provided a list or recommendation to assist school counselors in preparing this population for academic, social/emotional, and career success.

1. School counselors must examine their attitudes, beliefs, and biases toward African American students to appropriately understand their needs in the context of special education and advocate for appropriate services (Assouline et al., 2006; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005; Robinson-Wood, 2013).
2. School counselors should work with the district to properly notify students of their gifted status and include information concerning their gifted identification in their individualized education plan. School counselors should also meet with individually with twice-exceptional African American students to discuss strengths, gifts, goals, and strategies to capitalize on these gifts in an effort to make progress toward their goals. With the intersection of race, giftedness, and a special education identity, school counselors need to understand how self-perception impacts students' educational experience. School counselors must implement programs and activities to help students cope with and even embrace these identities.
3. School counselors need to encourage positive racial identity development among gifted African American students, as it improves academic success by reducing social and psychological stress (Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005).
4. Collaboration between school counselors, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel is needed to determine how to best support twice-exceptional African American students in attaining academic success. In regards to legal protections for special education, school counselors must assist school personnel in navigating this process to ensure students are receiving adequate services (Assouline, et al., 2006).
5. In addition to individual education plans, school counselors should work with twice-exceptional students in developing a career and academic plans that will prepare them for post-secondary opportunities. Career and academic planning is essential to ensuring students as many opportunities as possible to attain a post-secondary education (Harris, Hines, & Ham, 2013; Reid & Moore, 2008; Trusty, 2004).

6. School counselors should partner with local post-secondary institutions to understand the special education services offered and inform twice-exceptional students of the support available to assist with success at this level.
7. School counselors should increase their visibility with students who receive special education services by visiting frequently and providing classroom guidance lessons (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008).
8. School counselors should foster positive relationships with students by seeking alternative ways to build rapport and use this time as an opportunity to share their role in fostering academic success by emphasizing students' unique strengths and minimizing their deficits (Assouline et al., 2006).
9. School counselors should be instrumental in helping to establish a school-family-community partnership (Bryan, 2005; Epstein, 1995). This would assist school counselors in helping parents and students attain resources that schools have limited access to and it would provide more support for twice-exceptional African American students.
10. School counselors should develop a parent-training workshop to promote parents' awareness and knowledge of the types of special education and gifted services offered in the schools.

### **Implications for Future Research**

School counselors are in a unique position to collaborate with other school personnel concerning twice-exceptional students. They can share information on students by holding weekly meetings with special education teachers. Information sharing sessions can help school counselors monitor student progress and plan for additional activities or supports to aid with student success. Additionally, school counselors can facilitate career groups for twice-exceptional students to discuss their plans after high school and to highlight their disability as a strength, rather than a deficit, to increase their academic performance and career aspirations.

While this study offered noteworthy information from the interviews and other documents about the lives of twice-exceptional African American students, the findings could have been strengthened if observations included student interactions with peers, parents, teachers, administrators, and school counselors. This would have provided a more in-depth understanding of the student experiences within the context of the home and school environment.

Also, because the students in this study were identified as being gifted in non-academic areas (e.g. instrumental music, vocal music, dance, etc.), future research should incorporate the experiences of twice-exceptional African American students who are identified as academically gifted (or superior cognitive) and receiving services. In so doing, it would shed light on the impact of gifted services on students' overall experiences in education as well as how they conceptualize their race, disability, and giftedness.

Future studies should also explore how differences in identification impact students' experience. More specifically, students who experience their giftedness first may have a very different experience than students who experience disability first. Likewise, experiences may differ greatly based on disability. For example, a study might explore the differences in experience of twice-exceptional African American students who have physical disabilities in comparison to those with disabilities related to their cognitive or social/emotional abilities.

Follow-up studies with twice-exceptional African American students are also needed that explore the issues they face in transitioning from high school to post-secondary education. A study of this nature could highlight how and if students' understanding of their unique needs and gifts change over time, as well as their experience in finding supports in a new system.

### **Conclusion**

The status of twice-exceptional African American students in education is perilous. The findings in this study have the potential to assist high school counselors as they work with twice-exceptional African American students preparing for post-secondary opportunities. It also may provide insight into the partnerships and resources needed to ease students' transition to post-secondary education or the world of work.

Despite being identified as gifted, these students did not have their talents recognized or developed during their schooling as the majority of students did not receive gifted services. Moreover, their general and special education teachers did not recognize and incorporate their gifts into their classes, and they often did not accommodate their special needs. Instead, students were the recipients of negative messages about their abilities in academic, personal/social, and career contexts. If these messages continue, twice-exceptional African American students may face challenges in reaching their full potential and being successful both in and outside of school.

It is evident that considerable advocacy and support are needed to help twice-exceptional African American students develop the skills and attitudes necessary to navigate negative experiences. Given the aforesaid, school counselors can serve as advocates for these students by attending to their unique needs through systemic programs and activities, and building networks of support among teachers, families, and the community to ensure their academic, personal/social, and career success. Moreover, school counselors can serve as advocates to ensure that twice-exceptional African American students obtain the skills necessary to become self-advocates. By acquiring skills in self-advocacy, these students will not only be prepared to enter and navigate postsecondary opportunities, they will also be prepared to assimilate into their local communities and the society at-large.

### **AUTHOR NOTES**

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gender, and disability status), and school counselors' role in school, family community partnerships. Dr. Mayes research interests also include STEM exploration for historically underserved K-12 students. **Erik M. Hines, PhD, NCC**, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Connecticut. His research agenda include: African American male academic achievement and college readiness, parental involvement and its impact on academic achievement for students of color, and improving and increasing postsecondary opportunities for first generation, low-income, and students of color (particularly African American males). His research interests also include career exploration in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) for students of color in K-12. **Paul C. Harris, PhD, NCC, NCSC**, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Counselor Education at the University of Virginia. His research interests include the college and career readiness process of underrepresented students, particularly Black male student-athletes. Dr. Harris is also interested ingroup counseling prevention and interventions activities for historically underserved students.

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## Educational Tweets

*William E. Moore*

### **Teach Students How to Learn!**

*Sandra McGuire*

Discussions about the lack of preparation of high school graduates for the rigors of college are pervasive. The Executive Summary of the College Board's 2013 SAT® Report on College & Career Readiness stated that "fewer than half of all SAT takers in the class of 2013 graduated from high school academically prepared for the rigors of college-level course work". Although it is true that many students come to college unprepared, the lack of preparation for college does not result in lack of success in college *if* instructors know how to teach students effective metacognitive learning strategies. In other words, even unprepared students can be taught how to think about their own thinking, how to take responsibility for their learning, and how to implement successful learning strategies. When failing students learn effective strategies, they turn F's into A's in a matter of weeks. However, most professors have not learned how to teach students these strategies, and the result

is widespread unnecessary failure. A Google search of "effective metacognitive learning strategies" will yield a multitude of sites that provide strategies that faculty can easily teach and that students can easily implement. When instructors stop judging students' potential on their level of prior preparation and begin providing them the tools for success, students will rise to a level that they themselves may have deemed impossible to reach. But teaching these strategies requires a small amount of time devoted to this topic. Many professors say that in college we can't afford to take the time to teach these skills. But, the truth is, we can't afford not to!

~ *Sandra McGuire, PhD, Distinguished Alumna, Southern University Department of Chemistry, (Retired) Assistant Vice Chancellor & Professor of Chemistry, Director Emerita, Center for Academic Success, Louisiana State University. E-mail: [smcguil@lsu.edu](mailto:smcguil@lsu.edu)*

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### **Science, Gender, and Race: A First-Year Seminar Course in Critical Inquiry**

*Sibrina Nichelle Collins*

This semester, I am teaching a first-year seminar (FYS) course entitled, "Science, Gender, and Race." It is a required course that focuses on helping students develop effective writing and critical thinking skills, namely, constructing an argument, supporting an argument with evidence, and defending an argument. There are several FYS sections offered and faculty teaching FYS courses have the academic freedom to select their own theme and focus area. Because of my long-standing passion of diversity and history of science, I decided that students would explore the contributions of women and scientists of color. For over a decade, my research and scholarship have focused on this broad topic, and the FYS course presented a unique opportunity

for me to engage students in class discussions using my research as one of its components. Using an editorial that I had written on “African Americans and Science” (2009), students will be asked to discuss this publication in small groups; their specific tasks will be to identify the thesis statement and discuss some characteristics of editorial writing. We will also discuss the career of Dr. Ernest Everett Just, a pioneer in the field of cell biology and Dr. Thomas Nelson Baker, Jr., the first African American PhD chemist from The Ohio State University. At the end of the semester, each student will give an oral presentation on two scientists using library and Internet resources. The name of the first scientist will be provided to each student; the name of the second scientist will be chosen by each student. By selecting one of the scientists, I am ensuring that a diverse group of scientists will be discussed. The course will conclude with students demonstrating effective writing and critical thinking skills, and an appreciation of the important contributions of scientists of color.

~ *Sibrina Nichelle Collins, PhD*, Department of Chemistry, The College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio. E-mail: [scollins@wooster.edu](mailto:scollins@wooster.edu)

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## The Event Zone

*Martha Jallim Hall ♦ Michael J. Maiorano*

### **National Center for Case Study Teaching in Science Annual Conference**

September 19-2014  
Buffalo, New York

### **EDUCAUSE 2014 Annual Conference**

September 29- October 2, 2014  
Orlando, Florida

### **Seventh International Conference on e-Learning & Innovative Pedagogies**

October 3-4, 2014  
Pacific University  
Forest Grove, Oregon

### **Society for the Teaching of Psychology Annual Conference**

October 10-11, 2014  
Atlanta, Georgia

### **The Teaching Professor Technology Conference**

October 10-12, 2014  
Denver, Colorado

### **International Society for Exploring Teaching and Learning Annual Conference**

October 16-18, 2014  
Denver, Colorado

### **Global Learning in College: Cross-Cutting Capacities for 21st Century College Students**

October 16-18, 2014  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

### **Georgia Educational Research Association Annual Meeting**

The Power of Education Research for Innovation in Practice and Policy  
October 17-18, 2014  
Savanna, Georgia

### **ASCD Conference on Educational Leadership**

October 31-November 2, 2014  
Orlando, Florida

### **Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities Annual Meeting**

November 2-4, 2014  
Orlando, Florida

### **25th Annual CASE Conference**

Council of Administrators of Special Education  
November 13-15, 2014

### **National Train-the-Trainer Institute Conference**

Co-Teaching That Works  
December 2-5, 2014  
Boston, MA

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### **Complimentary Seminars by Staff Development for Educators**

#### **Twitter for Teachers 201 (Gr. PreK-5)**

September 9, 2014

#### **Math Interventions: Diagnosing Student Errors (Gr. 1-5)**

September 16, 2014

#### **Games that Teach 10-ness (Grades K-2)**

December 2, 2014

#### **Using Guided Drawing to Motivate Young Readers and Writers (Grades PreK-2)**

December 4, 2014