

SWK 770- RACIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

Reflection #1: Equity in Special Education: The Role of Race, Income & Ethnicity & The Way
Forward

Lourdes Tayas

NYACK COLLEGE

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(1) Before 1975, children with disabilities were denied access to public education and opportunities to learn. There were no requirements children with disability receive education. In 1970, schools educated only one in five children with disabilities, and many states excludes children who were blind, deaf, emotionally disturbed or had an intellectual disability. They were institutionalized without providing education in many states, until congress enacts the Education for All Handicapped Children Act known as EHA in November 1975. And in 1990, EHA was changed to Disabilities Education Act or IDEA.

IDEA (1975) requires public schools to find every child with disability and ensure their education is tailored to their needs. The goal of this law is to make sure everyone else will access and benefits from their education. Several laws were passed including early intervention and increase accessibility to provide services to children born with disabilities. No Children Left Behind (NCLB) (2001) secures students with disability are in general education students first. It requires all students with disabilities, except for small portion, take same assessment and be held with same academic standards with students without disabilities. Together, special education and general education laws put the general education and students with disability with the same footing.

One goals of IDEA was inclusion. Before 1975 students with disabilities were being separated. Today 70% with LD &ADHD spend most of the time in general education classroom. Students are guaranteed public school, graduation rates are growing up, stigma is decreasing, and awareness is increasing.

(2) But education is failing the 1 in 5 students with disability. Though they have average or above-average intelligence and yet lower self-efficacy and worse academic outcomes. 96th of 7th graders with learning disabilities scored below in reading and math. Negative outcomes cause negative effect more likely drop-out of high school, lower college completion rate, likely to be jobless, and chance of involvement with criminal justice system. Students of color face greater challenges. Low-income students, students of color and English language learners more likely to be identified as having specific learning disabilities. Black and Latino more likely to attend school in high-poverty districts that lack resources. 1 in 4 black males with IEP's received out of school suspensions compared to 1 in 10 white males. Black, Hispanic, and Native American with disabilities left HS without diploma compared to 25% Asian and White students.

Significant dis-proportionality in special education is noted in the over-representation of special groups in special education programs in relation to over-all enrollment. And/or under-representation of specific groups in accessing intervention services, resources, programs, curriculum and instruction. The over-representation of students with disabilities by race and ethnicity in suspension by duration, frequency and intensity.

Two theories of why this is happening. The Prevalence theory and Bias theory. Prevalence theory-- students of color are more likely to be low-income. Low-income, students are exposed to nutritional deficiency, medical and environmental factors lead to disability. Bias theory – students of color are more likely to be identified as having a disability because of systemic racial biases build into the structure of our communities and schools. “Standing out” drives the diagnosis. The person conducting assessment is subject to bias. Why is this happening? Is it income the factor or race?

The Harvard research #1. Income categories, are Black and Hispanic more likely to be identified for special education than white student? Findings: a) Low-income students are more likely to receive a special education designation when compared to non-low income of same race. b) Black and Hispanic are more likely than White students from same category to be identified as being eligible for special edition. Research #2: Placements? Findings – once identified as having disability, Black and Hispanic are more likely than White to be place in a substantially separate educational program.

Harvard research supported that race and income are correlated. That race is a factor regardless of income. Placements- Income does play a role. Low -income students Black and Hispanic will likely place in special education. But same with White low-income student likely more to be with segregated educational program.

(3) On learning deficit thinking findings on educating students with educational disability. The cultural deficit thinking: belief that poverty influences cognitive ability. The findings a) teachers with more deficit thinking maintain less cultural awareness knowledge b) teachers deficit thinking increases correlated with increases in colorblindness and racial discomfort c) teachers who are more confident in their pedagogical capacity have less deficit thinking.

Implications for students is that teachers/educators who are cultural aware, acknowledging race, confident, stronger teacher, addressing equity and disparity in classroom are more to have better results. Changing mindset and beliefs, for example, students from lower income family and community is less capable of learning, which is not true. Teachers/educators and, I would add social workers, who are positive, aware of race and culture, highly confident of their roles, dealing with intersectionality with individuals of disability, are more to have better outcomes.

