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The Intersection of Race, Culture, Language, and Disability

Implications for Urban Education

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To date, few researchers have sought to examine the effect of issues of race, culture, language, and disability, let alone to look specifically at the intersection of these issues, as it relates to special education identification, special education service delivery, and students of color's access to an equitable education. Thus, this article will attempt to help urban education researchers and educators understand (a) why the intersection of race, culture, language, and disability is an urban education issue; (b) how issues of race, culture, language, and disability affect students' and their families' quest for an equitable education; (c) how to advocate for and provide culturally responsive services to racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students and their families; and (d) the implications of the intersection of race, culture, and disability for urban education practice, research, and policy.

Keywords: *race; culture;language; special education; disability; urban education*

An overwhelming majority of children of color throughout the United States attend schools that are largely made up of students of color, and the quality of their schooling experience seems to be affected by the intersection of issues of race, culture, language, and disability. According to Orfield, Frankenberg, and Lee (2003), almost three fourths of African American and more than three fourths of Latino children attend majority student of color schools. This reality suggests that despite decades of desegregation mandates and careful attention to attempting to integrate

American schools, segregated schooling is not a thing of the past as some would like for us to believe, but rather, it is still quite prevalent in the American public school system and in fact has been steadily increasing for the past decade.

The resegregation of students of color is a significant societal issue that warrants immediate attention and action because schools attended by students of color tend to be schools in which the vast majority of the student population qualify for free or reduced lunch. As Kozol (1991, 2005) so vividly documented, the resources and overall quality of education afforded students who attend high-poverty schools are vastly different from what is available in schools that serve students who are White and middle class and often result in students of color facing a life of challenges and continued poverty. Not only do students of color attend high-poverty schools, they are also more likely than their White peers to actually live in poverty themselves. According to the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2005), 70% of African American students, 71% of Hispanic students, and only 23% of White students live in poverty, and these numbers are even more disparaging when it comes to students concentrated in urban environments.

Race and ethnicity also seem to play a significant role in determining the extent to which students are likely to attend high-poverty concentrated schools with students of color being more likely than their White peers to attend schools at which more than 75% of the students live in poverty (NCES, 2005). For example, 47% of African American students and 51% of Hispanic students attend high-poverty schools compared with only 5% of White students (NCES, 2005). On the surface one might ask, as the U.S. Supreme Court recently concluded, what is the problem or why is it that we as a society should be concerned about the fact that students of color, a disproportionate percentage of whom also live in poverty, are concentrated in schools together? The answer to this question is simple but very alarming. A considerable body of research (e.g., Ayers & Ford, 1996; Blanchett, 2006; Kozol, 1991; Losen & Orfield, 2002) clearly shows that schools that serve a majority student of color population are quantitatively and qualitatively different in terms of their resources and the quality of schooling afforded their children from those attended by predominately White middle-class students. In addition to robbing students of color of an equitable education, having students of color concentrated in schools with other students of color (many who also live in poverty) also robs them as well as their White peers of an opportunity to attend and benefit from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse schools. As the U.S. Supreme Court concluded in its decision in the University of Michigan's cases (American Council on Education), "The

benefits of diversity are substantial," the Court said, citing evidence that diversity helps to break down stereotypes, improves classroom discussion, prepares students for the workforce and citizenship, and permits universities to "cultivate a set of leaders with legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry" (p. 1). Thus, segregated schools both create and perpetuate educational inequities for African American and other students of color while at the same time perpetuating White privilege and dominance.

To date, few researchers (e.g., Ferri & Connor, 2005; Harry, 1992; Klingner, Blanchett, & Harry, 2007; Sleeter, 1987) have sought to examine the effect of issues of race, culture, language, and disability, let alone to look specifically at the intersection of these issues, as it relates to special education identification, special education service delivery, and students of color's access to an equitable education. Thus, this article will attempt to help urban education researchers and educators understand (a) why the intersection of race, culture, language, and disability is an urban education issue; (b) how issues of race, culture, language, and disability affect students' and their families' quest for an equitable education; (c) how to advocate for and provide culturally responsive services to racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students and their families; and (d) the implications of the intersection of race, culture, and disability for urban education practice, research, and policy.

As Klingner, Blanchett, and Harry (2007) noted, failure to place issues of race, class, culture, and language at the center of educational considerations and decision making assumes that the American education system, special education, and human and community services systems that provide service to families are race, class, culture, and language neutral. In this article, we would like to extend our previous work to more carefully look at the experiences of individuals with disabilities of color and their families as they have tried to navigate an American education, special education, and human and community services systems that are not responsive to the intersection of race, culture, language, and disability.

Why Is the Intersection of Race, Culture, Language, and Disability an Urban Education Issue?

African Americans and other students of color who are identified and labeled as having disabilities often experience what Blanchett, Mumford, and Beachum (2005) and Fierros and Conroy (2002) call "double jeopardy." Blanchett et al. (2005) used the term to refer to the fact that not only do

many African Americans and other students of color experience all the educational inequities associated with living in poverty and attending urban schools that are often insufficiently funded and resourced, but, in addition, these students are labeled as having a disability and many of them also experience inequities that are inherent in the special education system, including segregated classrooms, limited access to the general education curriculum, and poor post-school outcomes (Blanchett et al., 2005). In addition, when it comes to development disabilities, African American and other students of color have to contend with yet another set of issues and challenges in their quest for an equitable education. These issues and challenges include, but are not limited to, institutionalized racism, White privilege, and an increased risk for being identified as having developmental disabilities not because being African American or of color results in a disability but instead due to being more likely to live in poverty, receive inadequate prenatal care, and have limited access to early intervention services (Ford, Blanchett, & Brown, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2006). When there is indeed the presence of a developmental disability and families of color seek services, they are likely to encounter systems and structures that are not prepared to help them navigate services while living life at the intersection of race, culture, language, and disability, which results in them ultimately receiving culturally unresponsive and inappropriate services and interventions.

Even though the civil rights movement provided the foundation for special education, special education like the larger educational system has been associated with the inequitable treatment of African American students and other students of color since shortly after its inception. African American students and other students of color have a long history of being disproportionately represented in special education, which has been a debate in special education for more than 35 years. It is astonishing that only in recent years have claims that disproportionality is indeed connected to issues of race, culture, poverty, and language been taken seriously. This is in part because researchers have been able to document that the experiences of students of color in special education are very similar to the experiences of students in urban settings, and they have been able to use the urban education research to effectively make this case by applying an equity lens to contextualizing the treatment of students of color with disabilities. Similarly, in recent years, researchers have also drawn on critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and disability studies to question the social constructions of disability, disability categories, able-ism, and deficit conceptualizations of disability. Despite this significant progress, the intersection of race, culture, language, and disability still remains largely unexplored

and largely a missing component in the urban education research literature because urban education rarely addresses disability as a component of the larger urban education agenda, even though, like race, disability has been and is still being used as a method of sorting, stratifying, and excluding.

Public Schooling and Race, Culture, Language, and Disability in the United States: Sorting, Stratifying, and Excluding

Race has figured prominently in the evolution of public schooling in the United States since its inception. The latter half of the 20th century was marked by a struggle for equity within general and special education (Bullivant, 1993). The arguments concerning the role of schooling as a means of social reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 1985) rather than as a vehicle for social mobility (Blau & Duncan, 1967; Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969) are well known and we do not detail them here. Suffice it to say that although schooling has achieved a certain degree of social mobility for some, its structure, content, and methods of inculcating knowledge are readily recognized as being developed to suit the goals of the majority White American society, and until the civil rights movement of the 1960s, the social mobility of students of color was not a goal of American education.

Special Education: Equity and Efficiency in Conflict

Progress toward universal schooling for children regardless of handicapping condition was fueled by the civil rights movement and deeply influenced by its rhetoric of equality and solidarity. Although envisioned as parallel movements, it is not far-fetched to say that the special education and civil rights movements were actually on a collision course (Harry & Klingner, 2006). Special education became a way to provide separate services for some students, a disproportionate percentage of whom were students of color. The advocates for the right of all children with disabilities to a public education framed special education as one of the answers to the inequities of eras past. For the parent groups and other advocates who lobbied for the passage of a federal mandate for these programs, this was the purpose and vision of special education. Indeed, the establishment of the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped in the 1960s and the passage of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA) in 1975 followed in the wake of the civil rights movement. There is no doubt that, for the

thousands of children for whom there was no available schooling prior to 1975, the EHA represented the achievement of the society's goal of equity.

The issue of placement of non-White children in classes for students perceived as "slow" or mildly retarded came to public attention after the *Brown* desegregation decision. The reluctance of many states to comply with the *Brown* ruling led to the first official allegations of the use of special classes to continue covert forms of racial segregation. Prasse and Reschly (1986) noted that such allegations were reported in San Francisco as early as 1965 and that the first legal suit on the subject was *Johnson v. San Francisco Unified School District* (1971), which charged that the district was "dumping" African American children in classes for the "mildly retarded." The landmark *Larry P. v. Riles* case was filed just months after Johnson (1972), charging that biased IQ tests resulted in gross overrepresentation of African American students in mental retardation (MR) programs. The argument was based on the fact that, although African American students made up 28.5% of the total student body in the school district, they made up 66% of all students in classes for MR. The courts supported the plaintiffs' charge that the IQ tests being used to place children in the MR category were biased against African American children and declared that the disproportionate representation of African American students in programs for students with mild MR was discriminatory. They banned the use of IQ tests with African American students and ordered the elimination of overrepresentation of African American students in MR programs. Around the same time, similar charges were brought by Mercer (1973) concerning the high rates of placement of Hispanic children in MR programs in California. The most influential cases on this topic centered on language of testing, with Diana (1970), in California, arguing that Hispanic children were being inappropriately tested in English even when they only spoke Spanish, and Guadalupe (1972), in Arizona, making similar charges concerning both Hispanic and Native American children. In both of these cases, the plaintiffs were supported by the courts. These landmark court cases of the 1970s provided impetus for the mandate for nondiscriminatory assessment procedures in the civil rights legislation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that laid the groundwork for the requirements for nondiscriminatory testing and the due process safeguards against misclassification in the passage of the EHA (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998).

Prior to 1969, the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) used a cutoff score of 1 standard deviation from the mean (i.e., an IQ of 85). This definition was changed by the AAMD in 1969 to 2 standard deviations

from the mean (i.e., an IQ of 70). Mercer (1973) pointed out the irony in this change, noting that it brought about a "swift cure" for many who had previously been determined to be retarded. Since then, many states have used a variable guideline of a score between 70 and 75 on an IQ test. This, however, has only compounded charges of subjectivity and ambiguity, because a leeway of just 5 points actually results in large differences in the percentages of students who qualify (MacMillan & Reschly, 1998). Such debates highlight the arbitrariness of placement decisions and the social construction of disability (i.e., decisions about who has a disability and who doesn't have a disability).[1]

With the passage of the EHA in 1975, the special education and desegregation movements officially collided (Harry & Klingner, 2006). The concept of deficit had become a well-established part of the educational belief system and would become the driving force behind decisions about how to educate those who appeared different from the mainstream. Students of color who had once been excluded from schools with Whites would now be placed in special education at rates greater than their percentages in the overall school-aged population.

The Overrepresentation of Students of Color in Special Education Programs

When the disproportionate representation of ethnically and linguistically diverse students in high incidence special education programs (mental retardation, learning disabilities, and emotional disturbance) was first brought to the nation's attention by Dunn in 1968 and studied by a National Academy of Sciences panel (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982), the focus was on the overrepresentation of African American and Hispanic and high-poverty students in MR programs.[2] Between 1948 and 1966, there had been a 400% increase in the number of students identified as MR, and in 1975 when the Education for All Handicapped Children was passed, MR had the highest count of any exceptional child diagnosis. Although the MR category has, historically, been the source of most controversy with regard to ethnic disproportionality, it is now used much less frequently than in the past. Whereas the numbers in the learning disabilities (LD) category have increased almost sixfold over the past two decades, the rates of placement for all ethnicities in MR have been reduced by almost half. Nonetheless, among those students who are designated MR, African Americans are more than twice as likely as students of other ethnicities to be identified (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

Thus, although MR rates have declined overall, we still see significant overrepresentation of students of color in this category.

Disproportionate representation by ethnic group. Although disproportionate representation is most apparent among African American students when nationally aggregated data are the focus, there are marked differences across states and notable instances of overrepresentation among other ethnic and linguistic groups when data are disaggregated and population subgroups are examined (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999). Compared with all other groups combined, African American students are 2.99 times more likely to be classified as having MR, 1.17 times more likely to be classified as having autism, and 1.65 times more likely to be identified as having developmental delay. In contrast, Hispanic students are about half as likely to be classified as having MR and/or developmental delay (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

As the disability rights movement has taken hold, overall more students with disabilities are being included in general education classrooms. But, this is not the case for students of color. Unlike their White peers, students of color are often excluded from inclusive education programs and the general education curriculum (Fierros & Conroy, 2002; LeRoy & Kulik, 2003). Instead, they tend to spend 60% or more of their school day in segregated special education placements (i.e., in separate classrooms or separate schools from those attended by their nondisabled peers; 24th Annual Report to Congress, 2004). They are also more likely to have uncertified or provisionally licensed teachers and to graduate with a certificate of attendance/completion versus a high school diploma (Chamberlain, 2005). Once students of color exit special education, most common by dropping out or receiving a certificate of attendance, they experience high unemployment rates, a lack of preparation for the workforce, and difficulty gaining access to postsecondary education (Ferri & Connor, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002).

Assumptions About the Causes of Disproportionate Representation

Disproportionate representation is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by simplistic views that focus narrowly on the role of poverty or students' presumed lack of intelligence or other deficits and that pay too little attention to the role of context and other factors external to the child (Klingner et al., 2005), including but not limited to institutionalized White

privilege and racism (Blanchett, 2006). By *context*, we mean the various nested systems that influence a child's experiences as well as how the child is perceived, from the classroom, to the school, to the local community, to the larger society, much as with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems model.

Assumptions about the role of poverty. We question the notion that students of color are overrepresented in the MR category because they are more likely to have a disability because of an impoverished environment. In other words, although poverty and associated risk factors, such as low birth weight, exposure to alcohol during pregnancy, tobacco and drug use, malnourishment, and exposure to lead, are often described as causal factors in the development of language or cognitive deficits or maladaptive behaviors (Donovan & Cross, 2002), poverty itself does not automatically result in low learning potential, as evidenced by the significant number of children and schools who "beat the odds" (Donovan & Cross, 2002; O'Connor, 2002). O'Connor argued that there is nothing about poverty in and of itself that places poor children at academic risk but, rather, it is how structures of opportunity and constraint come to bear on their likelihood for achieving competitive educational outcomes. O'Connor and DeLuca Fernandez (2006) noted that a focus on poverty as the explanation for the overrepresentation of African Americans in MR programs oversimplifies the concept of development and consequently underanalyzes how the normative culture of society and thus schools (i.e., of the White middle and upper classes) situate minority youths as academically and behaviorally deficient in comparison. They assert that it is the culture and organization of schools (and not poverty) that places minority students at heightened risk for special education placement. Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Simmons, Feggins, and Chung (2005) made a similar argument based on their research in school districts in Indiana.

*Assumptions about intelligenc*e. One of the most lasting legacies of Western racism is a deep-seated belief in the inferior intelligence of individuals of color. Consider, for example, the effect of the best-selling book, *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein, 1994), which, despite its numerous flaws (e.g., Fraser, 1995), was taken seriously by a large segment of the mainstream population. Although many scholars have pointed out the arbitrariness of race and the fallacies inherent in attributing presumed variations in intelligence to racial differences (e.g., Gould, 1981), beliefs about inferior intelligence have been institutionalized in the policies and practices of our public schools (Steele, Perry, & Hilliard, 2004). Much has been written about

drawbacks when using intelligence tests with nonmajority populations, yet most school districts continue to classify students as MR based on IQ test scores. IQ tests reflect the cultural, social, and linguistic knowledge of the mainstream (e.g., Hilliard, 1994; Samuda, 1998) and thus, in comparison, students of color are more likely to appear deficient when in fact they are not. Because of concerns about the biased nature of IQ tests, numerous scholars have recommended the elimination or reduction of IQ testing. Hilliard (1995) contended that we need "either a paradigm shift or no mental measurement" (p. 6). The National Research Council (Donovan & Cross, 2002) emphasized that cutoff points for "disability" or "giftedness" are "artificial and variable" (p. 26) and called for an end to the requirement for IQ tests as a "primary criterion" (p. 313) for eligibility. They stated,

> IQ tests are measures of what individuals have learned—that is, it is useful to think of them as tests of general achievement, reflecting broad culturally rooted ways of thinking and problem solving. These tests are only indirect measures of success with the school curriculum and imperfect predictors of school achievement. (pp. 284-285)

Although eligibility criteria for intellectual disabilities still include IQ, despite the limitations of IQ tests, the field of LD is moving away from using the IQ-achievement discrepancy formula for identification purposes. At the U.S. Department of Education LD Summit (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002), experts in the field agreed to recommend discontinuing the use of the IQ-achievement discrepancy identification model and instead move to an approach that considers the extent to which students respond to valid interventions (Stuebing et al., 2002; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000). The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) includes Response to Intervention (RTI) as way to identify specific LD without reference to IQ.

Assumptions about the importance of contextual issues. Students of color are at greater risk of being identified for special education when too much emphasis is placed on finding within-child deficits through a decontextualized assessment process that does not account for their opportunity to learn. Donovan and Cross (2002) emphasized that context matters. They discussed the significance of classroom context in terms of teacher effectiveness:

> The same child can perform very differently depending on the level of teacher support. . . . In practice, it can be quite difficult to distinguish internal

> child traits that require the ongoing support of special education from inadequate opportunity or contextual support for learning and behavior. (p. 3)

Students of color are disproportionately educated in inner-city schools that lack the resources of schools in wealthier neighborhoods. Teachers' degrees, qualifications, and licensing or certification status in affluent communities are impressive and increasingly improving, whereas teachers in high-poverty schools are underprepared and know too little about teaching culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In their investigation of the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education in a large, diverse school district, Harry and Klingner (2006) found that teachers in inner-city schools with predominantly African American populations had fewer advanced degrees, were less qualified, and were more likely to demonstrate weak instructional and classroom management skills than teachers in other schools in their sample. Kozol (e.g., 1991, 2005) focused the nation's attention on the failure of U.S. schools to improve the status of education for children of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This substantial inequality in practice actually serves to perpetuate the status quo (Gutierrez, Asato, Santos, & Gotanda, 2002).

Educational and Service Access Issues and Barriers for Diverse Individuals and Families

Like students and families of color in urban settings who are not affected by the presence of a disability, diverse individuals with disabilities and their families experience a number of challenges in trying to navigate the urban education, special education, and human and community services systems. Consequently, in the next section, we portray service delivery access issues and barriers for diverse individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. These include, but are not limited to, differing cultural perspectives of disability, limited access and unfamiliarity with available service delivery options, service providers' lack of understanding of the effect of families' race, social class, cultural values/beliefs, experiences, and perspective of disabilities on service delivery, and families' lack of access to culturally and linguistically responsive curriculum and services (e.g., Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day, 1999; Rueda, Monzo, Blacher, Shapiro, & Gonzalez, 2005).

Families' Cultural Beliefs and the Institutional Culture of Special Education Disconnect

Because families' cultural beliefs and cultural frames of reference affect their understanding, acceptance, and perspectives of disability, it is important that educators and service providers understand how issues of culture influence families' perceptions of disability and ultimately their experiences in securing services for their loved ones with developmental disabilities. Research has clearly documented that parents' culture, values, and beliefs influence how they perceive and respond to their child with a disability (e.g., Harris, 1996; Harry, 1992). Most families go through a process of grieving the birth of a child with significant disabilities and eventually move through various stages toward acceptance of the reality that their child has a disability that may alter their child's life as well as their dreams for their child. Yet, parents' adaptation to and acceptance of their child's condition vary. For example, in research comparing the attitudes of mothers toward the birth of a child with a developmental disability, Mary (1990) found that Hispanic mothers were more likely than White or African American mothers to adopt an attitude of "self-sacrifice toward their young child with a disability." Similarly, in her research with African American parents and Hispanic parents, Harry (1992) found that these mothers were more likely to see the birth of their child with a developmental disability as a "gift from God" and, as such, believed that it was their responsibility to care for their children and not the responsibility of external caregivers.

Parents' cultural perspectives of disability also affect the extent to which they seek out relevant services. Parents' cultural perspectives also play a role in how they experience the American special education system. For example, according to Kalyanpur and Harry (1999), special education is grounded in three core American macrocultural values that are major tenets of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990: individualism, equity, and choice. In providing an explanation of how these core macrocultural values affect special education, they indicated that

> the value of individualism underlies the principles of due process and individualized, appropriate education, whereas the principles of parent participation and the LRE are grounded in the right to freedom of choice. Similarly, the value of equity is embedded in the principles of zero reject, nondiscriminatory assessment, and parental participation. (p. 20)

To work effectively with ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, educators

and service providers must be aware that special education is a cultural institution that may or may not reflect the values, beliefs, and cultural perspectives of all parents. This is true, in particular, for parents of color as well as parents who are not native English speakers. Hence, it is critically important that educators and service providers engage in dialogue that will allow parents to share their perspectives on developmental disabilities in a nonthreatening manner and to have those perspectives respected and included in the provision of service delivery options afforded them.

Limited Access and Unfamiliarity With Available Services

The professional literature is replete with documentation of individuals of color with developmental disabilities and their families' limited access to or unfamiliarity with available special education and human and community services. Although people of color with developmental disabilities across all socioeconomic levels experience access issues, access to appropriate services and unfamiliarity with available services seem to be further compounded by lower socioeconomic status and living in either rural or urban areas (Gammon, 2000; Reichard, Sacco, & Turnbull, 2004). This is especially true for families who are caring for adults with MR or developmental disabilities because they tend to be more isolated, less supported, and more in need of comprehensive services than parents of younger individuals with MR or developmental disabilities (Black, Cohn, Smull, & Crites, 1985; Hayden & DePaepe, 1994). In addition, once individuals of color with developmental disabilities exit the public school system, their families and caregivers encounter even greater hardships and more access difficulties because available services are severely limited, especially in rural areas (Gammon, 2000).

Families of color experience greater difficulties in access and utilization of social services and, as such, they are less likely than majority families to receive innovative or best practices services such as "family-support system" and "supported employment" (e.g., Traustadottir, Lutfiyya, & Shoultz, 1994). The barriers to access for individuals of color with developmental disabilities and their families often are issues related to poverty, racism, and a lack of culturally relevant services. As a result of not receiving access to innovative services, individuals of color and their families with developmental disabilities must continue to rely on the traditional supports of supplemental security income (SSI) checks and health insurance in the form of Medicaid (Children's Defense Fund, 1974).

African Americans with developmental disabilities and their families may tend to rely heavily on the traditional supports of SSI and Medicaid because they are often so consumed with the struggle for survival as they deal with the realities of living in poverty while serving as a caregiver that they just do not have the energy or time to pursue special programs and services (Harry, 1992).

Another issue that affects families of color in their pursuit of appropriate services for their children with developmental disabilities is the availability of health care providers who both take Medicaid and are adequately trained to treat individuals with developmental disabilities (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Reichard et al., 2004). Although this is a problem for many families, regardless of their race, families of color are disproportionately poor, and when they also live in rural areas, it is difficult for them to identify physicians and dentists who are both trained and willing to treat patients with developmental disabilities because of the additional time involved in treating these patients and the often limited means of communication. Even when individuals of color with developmental disabilities and their families have access to needed special education and relevant social, community, and adult services, these services are often not culturally and linguistically sensitive and even more rarely are culturally and linguistically responsive (Gammon, 2000; Harry, 1992).

Traditional Versus Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Service Delivery

Traditional service delivery models have tended to approach developmental disabilities from the perspective that race, class, cultural beliefs and values, and language do not influence service delivery options and the quality of the services ultimately provided to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families (Ford et al., 2006). In recent years, researchers (e.g., Ford et al., 2006; Harry, Kalyanpur, & Day, 1999; Reichard et al., 2004) have emphasized the need to reexamine assessments, educational and social service practices, and interventions to ensure that they are culturally sensitive and better targeted toward diverse individuals and their families. However, despite numerous calls (e.g., Gammon, 2000) for the curriculum, assessments, and services used with students with developmental disabilities to be culturally responsive and tailored to students' learning styles, family values, and cultural and linguistic frames of reference, they continue to be largely monocultural.

To ensure that the values, beliefs, and perspectives of diverse individuals with developmental disabilities and their families are considered when conducting assessments and developing and implementing services, it is important for service providers to be knowledgeable of what it means to provide culturally and linguistically responsive services. As stated earlier, culturally and linguistically responsive services are those services that recognize, value, and infuse individuals of color with developmental disabilities' ethnic, cultural, and linguistic knowledge to inform pedagogical and service delivery practices and to employ that knowledge to design instructional strategies, communication strategies, assessment tools, and service delivery models. Service providers who provide culturally and linguistically relevant services acknowledge that the American special education system is grounded in American macrocultural values concerning communication and language, and as such, it disproportionately favors parents for whom English is their first language and those who speak and comprehend the "official" language. The term *official language* is used here to refer to the professional jargon that is most commonly used by teachers and professionals in the special education system that draws heavily on White middle-class communication and language patterns and styles.

Implications for Working Effectively With Diverse Students and Families

In response to the many issues and challenges we have described, we offer several suggestions for working with students of color with disabilities and their families:

1. Recognize the effect of issues of race, class, culture, language, and social class on families' access to relevant special education and social and community services. For example, educators and service providers who work with diverse students and families need to be educated about how race, class, culture, language, and social class may serve as barriers and thereby result in diverse families having limited access to relevant special education and human and community services.
2. Acknowledge that special education and related service provisions are based on White middle-class English-speaking cultural norms and values and may not reflect the cultural beliefs and values of diverse families, especially those who live in poverty and for whom English is not their first language.
3. Communicate with students and families in their native language using a professional interpreter versus a family member.

4. Communicate using lay and cultural terminology and avoid overreliance on professional jargon.
5. When meeting with families, ask about their hopes and dreams for their child and recognize that these may be different from those typical of mainstream culture (but are just as valid).
6. Make sure that printed materials are prepared in the native language.
7. Learn about and respect cultural, communication, and language norms and mores.
8. Be familiar with and acknowledge within-group ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and social class differences. For example, educators and service providers must recognize that even though diverse families might be members of a larger ethnic, cultural, racial, or linguistic group, they are individuals and should be treated as such.
9. Whenever possible, provide services to ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse families within the context of relevant community or cultural centers.
10. Involve individuals of color in the development of appropriate Individualized Education Programs and Individualized Family Service Plans that reflect their values and priorities.

Implications of the Intersection of Race, Culture, Language, and Disability for Future Urban Education Research and Policy

If we as educators and researchers take seriously the complexity and importance of understanding the intersection of race, culture, language, poverty, and disability and the need for children and families of color to receive educational and human and community services that are both equitable and responsive to their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic needs, those committed to urban education must do the following:

1. Broaden our conceptualization of urban education to include all oppressed and marginalized groups including but not limited to those affected by the intersection of race, culture, language, poverty, and disability.
2. Broaden our conceptualization of urban teacher education to include the preparation of both general and special education teachers for urban environments. Currently, despite the fact that the most significant special education teacher shortages are in urban settings, few teacher preparation programs prepare special education teachers with a focus on teaching in urban settings.
3. Broaden our conceptualization of urban education policy to include special education policy as a component of urban education policy.

4. Conduct research that illuminates the complexity of the intersection of race, culture, language, poverty, and disability using a strengths-based versus a deficit conceptual framework.
5. Continue to conduct research on what is working in urban education and urban special education versus what is not so that we build an extensive literature base that documents the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogy across a wide range of students and settings including students affected by the intersection of race, culture, language, poverty, and disability.
6. Advocate for educational policies that require general and special education teachers as well as other essential school personnel to be educated together in merged urban teacher preparation, counseling, and administrative leadership programs with a strong foundation in the essentials of urban education and urban teaching.

Conclusion

> The only way we'll get freedom for ourselves is to identify ourselves with every oppressed people in the world.
>
> —Malcolm X

Malcolm X made the above statement in reference to African Americans' struggle for civil rights and freedom in the 1960s, but this statement rings true today as we continue the fight to ensure that all children, most notably children of color, many of whom live in poverty, receive an equitable education in the American educational system. We dare say that the only way we will get an equitable education for all marginalized children and families affected by the intersection of race, culture, language, poverty, and disability is to identify them with oppressed children and families in urban settings and everywhere in the world. In conclusion, urban education emerged as a field of study or discipline to make known the gross injustices and oppression experienced by children and families in urban settings and, more important, to illustrate to the world the many assets that reside in these communities that are so often unfairly portrayed as "broken" and "in need of repair." Although a few scholars in urban education, such as Banks, Cross, Gay, Hilliard, and Sleeter, have addressed special education issues as a component of their urban education research agendas, they are the exceptions rather than the norm. Thus, it is our hope that this article has enlightened those urban educators who ask, "What does special education and disability have to do with urban education?" More important, we hope that we have communicated the urgent need for urban educators and urban special educators and all others

concerned about urban education to work together in our fight for equity in the interests of all of our children who experience life at the intersection of race, culture, language, poverty, and/or disability.

Notes

1. For further discussion of the social construction of disabilities, see Gergen (1994) and Reid and Knight (2006).

2. Mental retardation, learning disabilities, and emotional disturbance are the labels used by Donovan and Cross (2002).

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