Shawn Anthony Robinson, PhD

Introduction

Supporting Twice Exceptional African American Students: Implications for Classroom Teaching

_____

This special issue of *Wisconsin English Journal* sheds light on supporting twice exceptional (2E) African American students: Implications for classroom teaching. I contend it is important to provide operational definitions which promote solutions and change. Reis, Baum, and Burke (2014) define 2E as:

> Students who demonstrate the potential for high achievement or creative productivity in one or more domains such as math, science, technology, the social arts, the visual, spatial, or performing arts or other areas of human productivity AND who manifest one or more disabilities as defined by federal or state eligibility criteria. These disabilities include specific learning disabilities; speech and language disorders; emotional/behavioral disorders; physical disabilities; Autism

Spectrum Disorders (ASD); or other health impairments, such as Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). These disabilities and high abilities combine to produce a unique population of students who may fail to demonstrate either high academic performance or specific disabilities. Their gifts may mask their disabilities and their disabilities may mask their gifts.

Identification of twice-exceptional students requires comprehensive assessment in both the areas of giftedness and disabilities, as one does not preclude the other. Identification, when possible, should be conducted by professionals from both disciplines and when at all possible, by those with knowledge about twice exceptionality in order to address the impact of co-

incidence/co-morbidity of both areas on diagnostic assessments and eligibility requirements for services.

Educational services must identify and serve both the high achievement potential and the academic and social-emotional deficits of this population of students. Twice-exceptional students require differentiated instruction, curricular and instructional accommodations and/or modifications, direct services, specialized instruction, acceleration options, and opportunities for talent development that incorporate the effects of their dual diagnosis. Twice-exceptional students require an individual education plan (IEP) or a 504 accommodation plan with goals and strategies that enable them to achieve at a level and rate commensurate with their abilities. This comprehensive education plan must include talent development goals, as well as compensation skills and strategies to address their disabilities and their social and emotional needs. (pp. 222-223).

The authors of this special section also raise awareness of what Reis, Baum, and Burke describe as "behaviors alone can be misleading without understanding the characteristics of each exceptionality, the context in which a behavior occurs, and the effect of comorbidity on the combinations of giftedness with the diverse disabilities" (p. 219). In each paper, authors examine the importance of teachers understanding and acknowledging the characteristics of each student's uniqueness, and other factors hindering the identification and the educational services of this population (Baldwin, Omdal, & Pereles, 2015).

Another issue that affects students is the cultural mismatch they experience, as teachers do not always recognize the cultural capital they exhibit in the class (Ford, 2013; Robinson, 2016; Yosso, 2005). To effectively address cultural mismatch, and to raise awareness on how to best academically and socially support 2E African American students, the authors in this special section provide recommendations, strategies, and resources for:

- o Teaching practices that promote academic engagement and motivation;
- o Assessing and Identifying 2E students;
- o Providing a culturally responsive learning environment;

o Supporting families of 2E students;

o Discussing placement, programs and practices for 2E students.

In the first article, "Karl Is Ready! Why Aren't You? Promoting Social and Cultural Skills in Early Childhood Education," Wright, Ford, and Walters, take a preventive and anti-deficit approach. The authors emphasize that teachers who are culturally competent and understand, affirm, and are responsive to Black males' culture and identities, can reverse their negative experiences and ensure academic success. Further, they provide an overview of educational outcomes for school readiness and provide a personal vignette of a student named Karl. The authors speak to what Black boys can do, rather than what they "allegedly" cannot do, and end with recommendations to support educational institutions in order to ensure that PK-12 teachers are ready for young Black boys.

In the second article, "#Black Intellect Matters: Inequitable Practices Yield Inequitable Results," Ford, Lisbon, and Little-Harrison provide a story about a student named Terrence who could have been academically pigeon-holed as a "slow learner" because of testing bias, cultural bias and language differences in assessments. The authors discuss how using assessments to address student achievement is at the

forefront of education and a topic marked by controversy when the population consists of students of color. The authors address best practices when it comes to standardized tests and end with recommendations for K-12 teachers, school psychologists, and families.

In the third article, "Too Bad to Be Gifted: Gifts Denied for Black Males with Emotional and Behavioral Needs," Owens, Ford, Lisbon, Jones, and Owens provide a case study of Donovan, a highly intelligent Black boy identified with emotional disorder. Donovan's story exemplifies the overwhelming findings at federal, state, and local levels about minorities disproportionately placed in special education, who indeed exhibit traits of 2E.

In the fourth article, "Schooling at the Liminal: Black Girls and Special Education," Evans-Winters offers the tenets of Black feminism and critical race theory as the framework for understanding Black girls' experiences in the special education referral process. The shared narratives reveal how Black girls from lower-income and working class families may be at higher risk of being identified as learning disabled and/or as having a behavioral or emotional disability compared to their middle class and White peers. The author ends with implications for special education, teacher education development, and for social workers.

In the fifth article, "Relationships and Resources in Education and the Impact on Transition Planning," Blackwood provides a call to action for researchers and practitioners to begin exploring how social and cultural capital access impacts the experiences of students with disabilities as they transition into higher education. Blackwood concludes with implications for research, policy and practice.

In the sixth article, "How Coaching Special Olympics Changed the Trajectory of My Life," Robinson offers a narrative that addresses a period in his life when he was disengaged and angry, which affected his schooling. As authors Owens et al. discuss in this special issue, students with learning disabilities and behavior disorders face enormous academic and social challenges, which are reflected in his narrative. Robinson discusses: (1) a brief overview of the characteristics of a gifted student with a learning disability and behavior disorder, (2) his high school experience, and (3) recommendations for identifying 2E students in special education who are often overlooked and academically neglected.

In the seventh article, "Speaking from the Margins: Recounting the Experiences of a Special Educator and His Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students," Stewart and Kennedy offer an approach that shows the power of narrative inquiry. The authors' article is tri-fold. First, they discuss the trauma of being degraded by bigotry as a Black male special educator. Second, authors shed light on the experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse 2E students. Finally, they provide strategies for creating an inclusive learning environment and working with parents. Furthermore, the authors provide recommendations and implications for practices based on lessons learned from the marginalized, inadequately assessed and underserved population, which is validated by the research of Ford (2014).

In the final article, "Family Engagement and Advocacy for Culturally Diverse 2E students," Wood and Davis provide recommendations for how schools can enhance advocacy efforts and increase support for culturally diverse 2E learners by engaging with families and communities.

As the guest editor, I am pleased to share this set of readings with the hope that the articles are used to improve the academic outcomes of 2E African American students in and out of special education. This student group has been neglected for far too long, which results in numerous and extensive gaps in knowledge, theory, and academic support (Mayes & Moore, 2016). I am aware that this special section neither fills *all* voids nor meets *all* needs. Nonetheless, the articles

offer much in the fields of gifted, multicultural, and special education, language and literacy, diversity and beyond.

References

Baldwin, L., Omdal, S. N., & Pereles, D. (2015). Beyond stereotypes: Understanding, recognizing, and working with twice-exceptional learners. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *47*(4), 216-225.

Ford, D.Y. (2013). *Recruiting and retaining culturally different students in gifted education*. Waco: Prufrock Press.

Ford, D. Y. (2014). Segregation and the underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in gifted education: Social Inequality and deficit paradigms. *Roeper Review, 36*(3), 143-154.

Mayes, R. D., & Moore, J. L., III. (2016). The intersection of race, disability, and giftedness: Understanding the education needs of twice-exceptional, African American students. *Gifted Child Today*, *39*(2), 98-104.

Reis, S. M., Baum, S. M., & Burke, E. (2014). An operational definition of twice-exceptional learners: Implications and applications. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 58*(3), 217-230.

Robinson, S. A. (2016). Triple Identity Theory: A theoretical framework for understanding gifted Black males with dyslexia. *Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals, 41*(1), 147-158.

Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 81*, 69–91.

Dr. Shawn Robinson is an independent scholar who focuses on the intersection of race, giftedness and dyslexia. He can be reached at drshawnanthonyrobinson@ gmail.com