

Lexi Callander

SEMS 400

Dr. Hanneman

Annotated Bibliography

Due: 12/10/2018

Turned In: 12/10/2018

WC: 1642

The overrepresentation of minorities in special education classrooms is an ongoing issue in today's educational system. When compared to the general population, minorities can be misplaced within their education and this can lead to short and long-term effects on the student. Different factors that can play into minority students being inaccurately placed in special education services that will be discussed in my paper are the quality of special education services, the difference in African American learning style, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and the overall bias in a classroom. I have chosen the intersectionality theory developed by Kimberle Crenshaw to justify why these factors are present and the influence they have on minority children's educations.

The intersectionality theory explains that different identities that are given to a person, race and class in this case, effect common goals of that person. Jennifer Nash (2008) describes intersectionality theory as "...the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality..." (2). The different identities given to a student that describe them are often taken into the classroom and stereotyped instead of each child receiving an education that allows them to reach their full potential. This theory helps us describe why there are test bias, cultural bias, and socioeconomic status bias in the classroom even if it is not intentional. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) speaks of intersectionality as "... the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience..." (139). When focusing on race and class, it is prevalent why students who are not part of the majority in classrooms are misplaced in special education. Because minority students take on different identities than the majority of students, teachers set those students apart. Simply because a student is categorized in a different class or by a different race than most students, their education seems to be limited.

With the use of this theory, I will analyze the different factors that play in to a minority child being placed in a special education classroom when there is no need and justify these actions. It can be argued that the more categories to which one belongs, they will experience more disadvantages (Carbado 2013). I will also be able to explain the consequences of the overrepresentation of minorities in special education classrooms. I will be able to research the different ways that teachers can fix this issue and have tried to reduce overrepresentation in the past. Most of the programs that have been introduced to schools in order to stop the overrepresentation of minorities in special education deal with educating teachers on multicultural curriculum and how all students are different and learn in their own ways. By doing this, teachers can acknowledge cultures other than the majority which will allow all students to succeed without their “identities” allowing them to be wrongly placed. **The overrepresentation of minorities is due to intentional or unintentional classroom bias which includes many factors that can be explained by the intersectionality theory. Race and class are the main influences on the disadvantages minority students are facing in the educational setting.**

These disadvantages become more evident in the classroom whenever the different experiences of the minority students are explored. These experiences include the quality of special education and regular education services offered, the nonrecognition of the African American learning style, and the effect of socioeconomic status and cultural background. All of these different experiences can lead to short and long term affects that can determine a student’s achievements in all aspects of life and can all be explained by the intersectionality theory. The quality of special education services relates to the over representation of minority students in special education. This is because of test bias, study team decisions and their subjectivity, pre-service preparation for the referring teacher, and management skills (Maydosz 2014). When you

combine all of these factors of special education services, they add up to giving minority students a negative experience in school and a very stereotypical placement in the services that are most likely not needed. Another factor that plays in to the misrepresentation is ethnicity of teachers and the understanding of cultural differences as well as African American learning styles. Most teachers are middle-class white females who may have a hard time relating to all of the students in their classroom depending on their identities. Kearns, Ford, and Linney (2005) write “Research and historical observation indicates that there are educators who perceive that African Americans have an inherent intellectual inferiority that necessitates remedial education.” (Kearns, Ford, Linney 299). After reading this quote, it is apparent that African Americans students are looked at as if they need remedial attention and services through their education. This is not always true but seems like it is to most teachers because they cannot relate these children to the white middle class culture of teaching that they have created in their classroom. This is where intersectionality theory comes into focus. Because of the students race and class, they have a disadvantage whether it is purposeful or not. Most teachers are not prepared for the teaching of different cultures or simply understanding different learning styles when it comes to race and class. Ruben Gentry (2009) writes “...African American students are suspended at higher rates than other students and overrepresented in office referrals, corporal punishment, and school expulsion. Also, African American students received more severe punishments for less serious infractions or were referred to the office more frequently for more subjective reasons, such as disrespect or loitering.” (Gentry 7). These statistics can be related to the stigmatization of African American students because of their socioeconomic status and their cultural background. Teachers often stereotype students who are a part of a minority because they do not become oriented with their culture. Education throughout the United States does not always take into

account other cultures. It focuses mostly on the knowledge, values, cultural orientations, and interests of white, middle class students (Gentry 2009). According to intersectionality theory, the race and class of these students are playing a key role in the incorrect placement during their education. Amos and Landers (1984) give us a direct correlation between the special education community and the minority communities whenever they write “In the past, classes for educable mentally retarded (EMR) and emotionally handicapped (EH) became overpopulated by children who were poor, bilingual, culturally different, or severely frustrated with the school.” (Amos, Landers, 145). Just like mentioned earlier, this is because the quality of services provided in regular education focuses on the needs of students who are not parts of a minority. Test bias can look like a test that focuses around values, ability, and cultural knowledge for students who are predominately white. To sum up the correlation between the ethnicity of an educator and how it affects minority students, O’Connor and Fernandez (2006) write: “In the United States, middle-class Whites provide the referent against which other children are evaluated, while U.S schools privilege the cultural repertoire of the White middle class and are otherwise structured to advantage whites.” (O’Connor and Fernandez, 8). Because mostly white middle-class teachers have difficulty educating themselves outside of their own cultural norm, it has a huge effect on the representation of minority students in special education. Faye Brosnan (1983) ties us into the stigmatizing effects of misrepresentation when she writes “Some critics have alleged that special education has served only as a vehicle for transferring urban, poor minority pupils from regular classrooms into stigmatizing classes for learning disabled and/or behavior problem youngsters.” (Brosnan 517). This quote shows how students who are already in lower socioeconomic statuses are stereotyped. This leaves lasting effects including a negative affect on their self-esteem and self-worth. If a student actually has a disability, special education services are appropriate for

that child and necessary. Each student deserves a free and appropriate education. Students without disabilities who are wrongly placed do not learn as much academically in special education as they would in general education (Gentry 2009). Students who are in special education services are often put into groups and criticized by not only their peers but by others as well.

To fix this misrepresentation, researchers have come up with different strategies. These methods can include assessments, plans, trainings, community involvement, and research. Ruben Gentry (2009) writes “Strategies for reducing disproportionate representation need to include comprehensive and multifaceted assessment and intervention plans. Central to such an approach is a process that moves from data collection and examination, to interpretation, to culturally competent intervention and evaluation.” (Gentry, 9). This quote sums up how to reduce misrepresentation by looking at the factors and effects and thinking of solutions to each one. Overall, these strategies will increase the knowledge of how children from other cultures differ in learning style and how to change your classroom environment and teaching styles to accommodate for this. Teaching is all about making sure each student is accommodated for and receiving the best education they can despite what their identity is. Intersectionality theory does back up why minority students are misrepresented, but there are ways in which we can try to help these students and reduce the data. Teachers need to be prepared to teach culturally diverse populations (Gentry 2009). If schools can focus on employing their schools with diverse teachers and people who are knowledgeable about other cultures, the stigma and stereotypes will slowly but surely diminish. Amos and Landers (1984) write “In the past, most teachers did not have any orientation to teaching children with differences- whether those differences were cultural, intellectual, or physical.” (Amos and Landers, 146). This quote is proof that we need to

incorporate the resources to educate teachers on how to teach students who are culturally different than the norm. Whenever we use different assessments, research, plans, and trainings we could reduce the percentage of minority students who are misrepresented.

References

- Amos, Oris Elizabeth, and Mary Frances Landers. 1984. "Special Education and Multicultural Education: A Compatible Marriage." *Theory Into Practice* 23 (2): 144-150.
- Brosnan, Faye L. 1983. "Overrepresentation of Low-Socioeconomic Minority Students in Special Education Programs in California." *Learning Disability Quarterly* 6 (4): 517-525.
- Carbado, Devon W. 2013. "Colorblind Intersectionality: Theorizing Power. Empowering Theory" *The University of Chicago Press* 38 (4): 813
- Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1) Article 8: 139-167.
- Gentry, Ruben. 2009. "Disproportionate Representation of Minorities in Special Education – How Bad?" *Arkansas State University*. A Presentation for The 3rd Annual Jane H. Leblanc Symposium in Communication Disorders. Pp 1-24.
- Kearns, Tori, Laurie Ford, and Jean Ann Linney. 2005. "African American Student Representation in Special Education Programs". *The Journal of Negro Education* 74: 297-310.
- Maydosz, Ann S. 2014. "Disproportional Representation of Minorities in Special Education". *Journal For Multicultural Education*. (8) 2: 81-88.
- Nash, Jennifer C. 2008. "Re-thinking Intersectionality". *Feminist Review* 89: 1-15.
- O'Connor, Carla and Sonia DeLuca Fernandez. 2006. "Race, Class, and Disproportionality: Reevaluating the Relationship between Poverty and Special Education Placement". *Educational Researcher*. 35 (6): 6-11.