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**The Progression from Discussing Overrepresentation to Implementing Culturally Adapted Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Interventions**

Portfolio II Foundational and Contemporary Literature Essay

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**The Progression from Discussing Overrepresentation to IMPLEMENTING Culturally Adapted Interventions**

Students of color experience educational inequities, which are especially pronounced when it comes to discipline rates as well as the enrollment in special education. Students of certain racial and ethnic groups are disproportionately identified for special education, placed in more restrictive educational environments, and disciplined at higher rates than their peers, a phenomenon known as significant disproportionality. The intersectionality between race and special education can cause students of color to be misidentified as needing special education due to bias within the educational system, including within assessments and academic policies, placed in more restrictive settings and subjected to harsher discipline. As a result, students may suffer adverse effects if they are misidentified as needing special education.

Historical and modern literature have examined the root and causes of racial and ethnic representation imbalance in special education. Social and environmental factors such as poverty and ethnicity (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010; National Research Council, 2002), as well as educational factors, such as inequities in the referral process, often emerge as the root cause (National Research Council, 2002). Other research has focused on economic inequity and race as predictors (e.g. Skiba, Simmons, Ritter, Gibb, et al., 2008).

Over the last decade, the overrepresentation debate has shifted from “why?” to “now what?”. In the last decade, cultural adaptations of social, emotional, and behavioral interventions for students of color have emerged as an effective mitigator to this imbalance.

**Historical Root of Overrepresentation**

Predating seminal special education legislation, scholars Dunn (1968) and Mercer (1973), questioned the social constructions of mild disabilities, and the practice of categorizing children at the intersections of race, culture, socioeconomic status, and perceived ability. Since the early scholarship of Dunn and Mercer, overrepresentation has been litigated in the courts. Cases such as *Larry P. v. Riles* (1972/1974/1979/1984) and *Parents in Action on Special Education [PASE] v.* Hannon (1980), were precedent setting cases questioning the reliability of assessments as indicators of intelligence and predictors of ability. These cases posited that inherent bias exists in intelligence (IQ) and other assessments. *Larry P. v. Riles (Larry P.),* filed in 1971, represented five African-American children in the San Francisco Unified School District placed in special education classes for the educable mentally retarded (EMR). The lawsuit claimed that the students had been wrongly placed in the class based on their performance on IQ tests that were racially biased and discriminatory. The suit also claimed that a disproportionate total number of African-American students were placed in EMR classes compared to the number of African-American students in the school system. The Court ruled in favor of the students, and the District was prohibited from using IQ tests to identify and place African-American students in EMR classes. The decision, upheld in 1984, expanded its ruling and banned the use of IQ testing for all African-American students referred for special education services.

*Larry P*. was a precedent-setting case because it not only involved assessment bias, but also implied that stigma associated with classification and labelling may contribute to educational failure (Artiles et al., 2015). At the time of this case, African-American children comprised 27% of the population with EMR but only 9% of the California population. The state of California was ordered to stop using any standardized intelligence test for the identification of African-American students with EMR unless it was proven to be free of racial or cultural bias. The relationships among legislation, policy, and practices of special educators and school psychologists were demonstrated.

Bias in assessments was further supported in the *Parents in Action on Special Education [PASE] v. Hannon* (1980) class action lawsuit, which decided that the use of IQ tests were culturally biased against African-American students. Subsequently, utilizing IQ tests to determine eligibility for special education was banned in the state of California. These cases established the legal precedent that inherent, explicit, and implicit biases exists in assessment. Historically, the courts have been used to influence the direction of special education and to codify *equal* educational opportunities regardless of race.

In an effort to acknowledge and mitigate the existence of bias in assessment and the negative impact on CLD students, additional court cases further addressed the problem. *Diana v. State Board* *of Education* (1970), resulted in bilingual children being tested in both English and their primary language and the use of nonverbal items and testing in their native language. *Lora v. Board of Education of the City of New York* (1977, 1980, 1984) centered on the disproportionate number of African-American and Hispanic-American students in classes for individuals with emotional disturbance. Due process rights related to linguistic, cultural, or ethnic background differences were incorporated into the standards and procedures for nondiscriminatory assessment.

Over the past 50+ years, the discussion of overrepresentation of CLD students in special education has evolved. The focus has shifted from identifying the causes of the disproportionality, to focusing on developing strategies to reduce the imbalance. This focus has included the implementation of culturally responsive practices (Ladson-Billings, 2012), utilizing data-driven decision making, and developing culturally competent educators (Kea et al, 2019).

**Minoritization of Students From Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Backgrounds**

Students are minoritized when they are forced to the margins and mistreated (Brown, 2020). Students from CLD backgrounds may experience this marginalization through overidentification, improper referral, and misplacement in special education. This can negatively affect their educational outcomes including lower graduation rates, high dropout rates (NCES, 2018). Over the past two decades, the conversation about disproportionality has begun to shift from problem to solution. Courts have determined the existence of bias in placement and have codified equitable access to education. A response to bias and marginalization have been education-based solutions and interventions.

**Education Based Solutions**

One recommended education-based solution is the use of a cultural response to intervention (CRtI; e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2021). Cultural responsiveness employs instructional strategies and materials that honor the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 2021). Brown et al. (2019) implemented culturally adapted social, emotional, and behavioral interventions by restructuring the procedure, content, and program delivery of behavioral interventions. This adaptation employed a cultural sensitivity within the educators employing the adaptation, and a cultural relevance in the intervention which has heretofore been lacking in the RtI process.

**Culturally Adapted Social, Emotional and Behavioral Interventions**

School personnel are more likely to apply punitive and exclusionary discipline practices to students of particular racial and ethnic backgrounds. As a consequence of these trends, many researchers suggest that experimentally validated social, emotional, and behavioral interventions must be modified to accommodate the cultural characteristics of students. However, scholarly recommendations regarding culturally adapted interventions lack practical methods for implementing them. A majority of researchers used recommended procedures to consider cultural adaptations when analyzing school-based social, emotional, and behavioral interventions (Brown et al., 2019), such as engaging with stakeholders and reviewing program materials, in studies investigating cultural adaptations to school-based social, emotional, and behavioral interventions. More conceptual adaptations including focusing on metaphors and language, concepts, and goals of the intervention were reported less frequently. Results indicated that there is a need for additional research on developing and implementing cultural adaptations for school-based interventions.

**Impactful Scholarship and Future Interests**

Disproportionality has been a source of increasing concern, but empirical studies of interventions that reduce these gaps have been limited. A wide range of terms are used to refer to culturally responsiveness, as identified by Debnam et al. (2014). These terms include culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2015), culturally responsive classroom management and behavior supports (Sugai et al., 2012), cultural proficiency (Lindsey et al., 2016), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012). The wide variation in operational definitions of CRP suggests more work is needed to achieve clarity and promote consensus on the outcomes of CRP interventions.

I have been greatly impacted by Kea (2003, 2016), Ladson-Billings (2021) and Gay (2015) in their scholarship of culturally responsive educators/assessment and recent literature by Brown (2019) on the implementation of culturally adapted social, emotional, and behavioral interventions. Their impact has impressed upon me to integrate culturally adapted interventions in my dissertation. I have always been interested in the lack of cultural relevance of Tier 3 interventions, which I believe are the final gateway to special education identification. I want to continue to explore research questions to discover if culturally adapted behavioral interventions have a functional relation with improved behavioral outcomes of African American males at risk for EBD and other conduct-based diagnoses.

[Word Count: 1406]

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