

Mini Review

Volume 21 Issue 1 - October 2023
DOI: 10.19080/PBSIJ.2023.21.556055

Psychol Behav Sci Int J

Copyright © All rights are reserved by Allison N Oliver

Black Boys in Special Education: The Making of Misunderstood Men



Allison N Oliver^{1*} and Christine Lewis Pugh²

¹Austin Peay State University, USA

²East Tennessee State University, USA

Submission: December 06, 2022; **Published:** October 09, 2023

***Corresponding author:** Allison N Oliver, Austin Peay State University, USA

Abstract

In this opinion article, co-written by two self-identified Black female assistant professors who have collaboratively worked in the public-school sector in the southern region of the United States as special education stakeholders servicing adolescent students of multiple ethnicities in varied socio-economic statuses, the authors contend that brown males in special education are often misunderstood and emotionally underserved in special education which leads to adverse outcomes and ongoing traumatic experiences beyond the school sector. The authors describe how educators can develop cultural humility skills and employ restorative practices to be more responsive to the social and emotional needs of black males in special education to work against adverse post-secondary outcomes with this population.

Keywords: Special education; Black males; Disproportionately; Social-emotional needs; Trauma-informed care

Introduction

Special education is intended to be a service and not a destination; yet, for many Black males in the public-school system, special education becomes a dumping ground for them when teachers struggle to manage their behaviors or understand the precipitating factors, they often possess from simply matriculating through the educational system as Black males in America. Nationally, it has been well researched that Black males in special education are overrepresented and disproportionately disciplined in the United States of America [1]. Research has proven that certain groups of students, typically minority males, are placed in specific special education categories at excessive rates.

According to the U.S. Department of Education [2], African American students ages 6 through 21 were over two times more likely to receive special education services for emotional disturbance and intellectual disabilities were students from all other racial groups [3].

While initial placement in special education is intended to help these students, it can reduce their employment options and opportunities for higher education when services are provided prematurely within these two eligibility categories and not from a comprehensive, non-bias lens. When Black boys fail to have trust in the school system due to the impact of trauma, adverse

behavior increases while academic achievement decreases, regardless of special education services being provided. Lack of trust leads to adverse behaviors and a disconnect in them having ongoing positive experiences in the school setting and left feeling emotionally underserved and simply misunderstood.

Historically, Black boys have been stereotyped and disengaged in school systems across America. A large part of the stigmatization comes from teacher perceptions which are at times unintentionally bias due to difficulty in recognizing their own implicit biases and cultural competence levels. The impact teacher bias has on student achievement and behavior is alarming and can lead students emotionally underserved and searching for an escape route. The escape route is often outwardly perceived as insubordination, defiance, disrespect, and/or irate behavior. To change the fate of Black males in special education and close the gaps of them being misunderstood and academically deficient, schools should employ concepts of cultural humility and restorative practices for teachers and staff.

Cultural Humility

Understanding the emotional baggage Black males bring to school along with their special education eligibility require schools to go beyond the traditional approach and handle behaviors of concern from a cultural and restorative lens. To better serve all students and their diverse needs, teachers and staff must first

understand the role culture plays in who their students are and become self-aware of their perceptions of their students. The foundational principles of cultural humility are grounded in the medical field; however, they have been implemented universally across disciplines. Initially, cultural humility was developed to mitigate the ideas that cultural competence and multicultural education encompassed of attainment of significant level of cultural knowledge would be enough to halt systemic imbalances in health outcomes. Tervalon and Murray Garcia [4] formed the term cultural humility to employ individuals to recognize their limitations in knowledge and skills regarding culture and to lean into navigating through the idea of engaging in ongoing experiences of lifelong learning. The overarching theme of cultural humility is having a growth mindset that encompasses, a process "of openness, self-awareness, being egoless, and incorporating self-reflection and critique after willingly interacting with diverse individuals" [5]. Cultural humility has three principle ideas: 1) lifelong learning and critical self-reflection, 2) recognizing and challenging power imbalances for respectful relationships, and 3) institutional accountability [4]. While schools across America have incorporated a baseline level of knowledge regarding multicultural education and cultural competence into their systemic practices, a broader scope of understanding is warranted to shift the trajectory of minoritized populations, especially Black males.

Schools should adopt the principles of cultural humility to address the social-emotional learning and academic advancement needs in Black males. Doing so, could potentially reduce the number of Black males being disproportionately placed in special education and inequitably disciplined. To assist in implementation and development of skillsets of practitioners in the schools, school leaders must first assess their school and staff members' current working mindset in each area of the principles of cultural humility: self-reflection, interpersonal dialogue, systemic protocols, and immersive experiences. The principles of cultural humility in schools engages administrators, teachers, staff, and students alike to embrace diversity and develop a mutual respect for what each member brings to the school. Schools that are providing professional development on cultural humility and actively emerging themselves in the work can employ instructional strategies that represent each student and their needs as well as foster inclusive learning environments. Cultural humility is a solution to assist schools in better understanding all students and interrupts the trend of Black males being stigmatized and prematurely placed in special education.

Restorative Practices

As previously noted, Black males in special education undergo far more traumatic experiences in exclusionary disciplinary practices than any other racial or ethnicity group at school during their formative years in education. It is evident that many schools across the nation still employ zero tolerance policies and

often have predetermined consequences for certain infractions; however, if school systems want discipline to decrease and academic achievement to improve, they must discipline from a restorative lens versus a punitive approach [1]. Restorative practices encompass a nonpunitive approach that is relationship concentrated, and addresses conflict through a collaborative, solution-focused lens among staff and students. Schools are now more diverse than ever and require a comprehensive plan such as restorative practices to address discipline proactively alongside principles of cultural humility.

Implementation of restorative practices focuses on repairing harm and traumatic experiences through open dialogue and inclusive practices that unite students and staff. Restorative practices work to rehabilitate students through reflection and sustainable solutions. Research indicates that Black males drop out of school at alarming rates as much as three times as much as their White counterparts due to a myriad of reasons, mainly from exclusionary discipline practices being employed and the beginning of the school-to-prison pipeline being realized. Restorative practices breed long-term positive outcomes when implemented with fidelity and are a positive step forward in healing students in outward and inward emotional distress. Restorative practices welcome students back from exclusionary settings by stakeholders working together from a student-centered lens to ongoingly rehabilitate the student [6]. Implementing restorative practices are typically inexpensive and take mostly heart work and the ability to listen and offer a supportive stance. Examples of common restorative practices are dialogue circles, respect agreements, re-entry circles, and staff training and reflective activities.

Additionally, school do not have to go purchase major curriculums or await funding as many resources are designed for educational settings are available online free of charge and are already aligned to principles of cultural humility. The restorative practice framework provides school leaders a guide to adapt to their setting and address all learners through a tiered system of supports. Teaching diverse students and shifting mindsets of all stakeholders is tasking but can be done through restorative practices [7].

Conclusion

There is an immediate need for schools to address the misunderstanding of Black boys in special education. Disproportionate discipline practices and inappropriate placements in special education has gone on far too long for Black males, and a call to action is warranted to assist schools in developing cultural humility and employing restorative practices. The best thing schools can do for all students is to not try to erase who students are and what experiences they bring to school, but to show them they are seen and heard for who they are. Our intent is not to remove all Black males from special education or create soft places for them to land when they are engaging in

behaviors that require discipline. The goal is to teach them how to respond when they are not successful academically, behaviorally, or socially by giving them the tools to succeed and embedding their reality into instructional practices and daily interactions. When school leaders, teachers, staff members, and students begin to understand each other, relationships, trust, and effective communication are established. Relationships give students vulnerability and in turn, they are more likely to engage in their academic experiences more positively. As more schools practice cultural humility and restorative practices, all students' needs will be met, thus reducing disproportionate placement and practices in special education.

References

1. Curran FC (2016) Estimating the effect of state zero tolerance laws on exclusionary discipline, racial discipline gaps, and student behavior. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 38(4): 647-668.
2. US Department of Education (2015) 37th annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2015. VA: U.S. Department of Education, Alexandria, USA.
3. Harper K (2017) The school-to-prison pipeline: The intersections of students of color with disabilities.
4. Tervalon M, Murray-Garcia J (1998) Cultural humility versus cultural competence: A critical distinction in defining physician training outcomes in multicultural education. *J Health Care Poor Underserved* 9(2): 117-125.
5. Foronda C, Baptiste DL, Reinholdt MM, Ousman K (2016) Cultural humility: A concept analysis. *J Transcult Nurs* 27(3): 210-217.
6. Welsh RO, Little S (2018) The school discipline dilemma: A comprehensive review of disparities and alternative approaches. *Review of Educational Research* 88(5): 752-794.
7. Cook CR, Duong MT, McIntosh K, Fiat AE, Larson M, et al. (2018) Addressing discipline disparities for Black male students: Linking malleable root causes to feasible and effective practices. *School Psychology Review* 47(2): 135-152.



This work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License
DOI: [10.19080/PBSIJ.2023.20.556055](https://doi.org/10.19080/PBSIJ.2023.20.556055)

Your next submission with Juniper Publishers will reach you the below assets

- Quality Editorial service
- Swift Peer Review
- Reprints availability
- E-prints Service
- Manuscript Podcast for convenient understanding
- Global attainment for your research
- Manuscript accessibility in different formats
(Pdf, E-pub, Full Text, Audio)
- Unceasing customer service

Track the below URL for one-step submission

<https://juniperpublishers.com/online-submission.php>