

Roundup 2a: Equity and Culture in Schools: Framing the Problem

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Starting with this second edition of the roundup I have decided to try to focus on one topic in Education. This helps me with finding articles to read (there are so many!) and will help you, the reader, know if it is something interesting for you. This edition is about Equity and Culture in schools. I have organized this into two major sections:

1. Framing the problem: Race, Ethnicity, Disability, and Socio-Economics
2. Possible solutions

Due to the length of this post, it only covers section one.

Enjoy!

Disability

Voulgardies, C.K., Fergus, E., & King Thorius, K.A. (2017). Pursuing Equity: Disproportionality in Special Education and the reframing of technical solutions to address systemic inequities. *Review of Research in Education*, 41,61-87. DOI: 10.3102/0091732X16686947

This article is a research review which examines what is known about disproportionality and some of the “prevailing explanations as to why the problem persists.” The authors explain that minority students from low-income backgrounds are generally overrepresented in high-incidence disability categories (LD, SLI, EBD, and ID). “The students most affected by disproportionality tend to be low-income Black, and American Indian youth with disabilities. In contrasts, ELLs tend to become overrepresented later in the schooling process and in districts with large ELL populations.” Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students are also suspended more severely than their White peers for similar infractions. Black males are the most likely to be suspended for “subjective reasons”.

The authors list some of the sources of disproportionality that research has found:

1. Practice-Based Factors
 1. Cultural mismatch
 1. “There is growing empirical evidence that teacher beliefs and expectations of students, based on race, relate to disproportionate outcomes.”
 2. Gaps in development and implementation of interventions and referral systems
2. Sociodemographic factors In this section of the review the authors criticize the line of research that suggests that race, SES, family structure, and so on, are predictive variables with success. The authors state that this unintentionally blames the victim and fails to recognize institutional racism.

“Both topics, practice-based and sociodemographic factors, demonstrate complexities in the sources of disproportionality and a substantive representation of these studies suggest nuanced patterns of racism and other forms of bias.”

In the next section the authors discuss existing remedies, which all lie within the realm of compliance monitoring using the IDEA indicators. The authors state that, even though this system exists, the problem is still extensive.

I really liked this quote: “Disproportionality is often framed as a technical issue that can be ‘fixed,’ through interventions or programs. However, Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, and Ortiz (2010) highlight how problematic this view is and state ‘the reluctance to frame disproportionality as a problem stresses technical arguments that ignore the role of historical, contextual, and structural forces.’ The technical view of special education and IDEA is based on the idea that disability, and deficits, reside within individuals and can be fixed by individual remedies. Thus, the ‘structural underpinnings’ of disproportionality are ignored...”

The authors conclude by arguing for more nuanced approaches to intervening in special and general education and argue that MTSS (RtI and PBIS) are not successful in improving outcomes for ALL students.

Socio-Economic Status

Owens, A. (2018). Income segregation between school districts and inequality in students’ achievement. *Sociology of Education* 91(1), 1-27. DOI: 10.1177/0038040717741180

Ann Owens makes the argument that income segregation plays a role in the achievement gap in this study. Owens draws on years of research in the field to support her findings. The literature review was interesting to read, here are some of the more interesting points:

- The gap between high and low-income students’ test scores has risen by about 40% among students born in the early 2000’s vs those born in the 1970’s.

- Income segregation rose over the 20 year span from 1990 to 2010 by 15%.
- An additional \$1,000 in family income among low-income families corresponds to a 5-7% standard deviation increase in children's test scores.
- Direct effects of higher income (providing food, clothing, shelter, childcare, and enrichment) seems to have more impact than indirect effects (less stress, improved parental health).
- Living in a disadvantaged neighborhood reduces cognitive test scores
 - One study looked at black children in Chicago and found that growing up in a poor neighborhood reduced verbal ability by the equivalent of missing a full year of school.
- Per-pupil expenditure may have an impact on achievement (data does not suggest this is true in the Lower Hudson region)
- Income segregation creates inequality in the social resources available to high and low-income districts. Schools are generally homogeneously low or high-income.
- Lower income students gain more in affluent districts than in poor districts.
- Black students attend schools with double the poverty than white students on average.
- White middle income households lived in neighborhoods with median incomes \$10,000 more than black households with identical incomes.

Owens compiled data and ran her own analysis and found the following to be true in highly segregated (by income) Metropolitan Statistical Areas (*MSA's*):

- On math scores, students from the lowest quintile incomes changed very little while those from the highest quintile gained.
- In reading high income students gained while low-income students lost.
- Overall the higher-income students gain and the lower-income students stagnate.
- There is little evidence that it is detrimental for a poor student to be in a low-income district vs a high-income district. Poor students across all districts are at a disadvantage and the gap continues to grow. The gap between poor students in low vs high income districts does not grow significantly.
- The racial achievement gap is wider as economic segregation grows.
- In *integrated* *MSA's*, the gap between White and Black students in non-significant (confidence interval contains 0). As income segregation increases so does the gap. In fact, the relationship in math and reading stated earlier is true for the racial gap as well
 - In math Black students have no change over time while White students grow and in reading White students grow and Black students lose.
- Income segregation provides large advantages for high-income White families but not for high-income Black families.
 - In highly segregated *MSA's* the average high-income black family lived in a school district with nearly identical median income as the average low-income White family (\$45,000 vs \$46,000).

I found this quote to be very important and a nice summary of the research: “Achievement gaps emerge not only because disadvantaged students fall behind but also because advantaged students pull away.”

Besse, J.A., & Martin, J. (2018). Socioeconomic status and student opportunity: A case of disrespect or teenage rebellion?. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership* 21(1), 16-27. DOI:10.1177/1555458917720967

This case study discusses a new Superintendent and her new initiative in an inner-city district which is 75% Black, 20% Hispanic, 5% White and 100% economically disadvantaged. The new program was a sports focused summer camp which was directed by a young woman not from the neighborhood. There were many mistakes made along the way, usually due to not understanding the neighborhood, but the focus of the study is on one incident. The program gave bus passes to all students who attended the camp, and all students used public transportation to get to camp. One day a large number of teens did not show up to camp. They decided to go to the local mall instead. The director took this as a disrespectful act performed by ungrateful youth. The physical education teacher, who was from the neighborhood, had to explain to her that this had nothing to do with disrespect, rather it was simple teenage rebellion; the kids were acting as any other teen would, and were doing exactly what teens in White neighborhoods were allowed to do in the summer.

The case study ends with this: “Educators must be cognizant of students’ various and interlocking identities to truly meet their needs. To do so, educators must look deeply into issues of identity; otherwise, they may either cause or ignore problems.”

The authors recommend viewing Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw’s TED talk on **intersectionality** ([clickable link](#))

Race

Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevarez, A. (2017). The “new racism” of k-12 schools: Centering critical research on racism. *Review of Research in Education* 41, 182-202. DOI: 10.3102/0091732X16686949

In this chapter of the Review of Research in Education the authors set out to answer two questions:

1. What insight does current research on racism in K-12 schools offer about the experiences of students of Color?
2. What gaps and directions does this scholarship point to in education research?

The authors categorize current scholarship on race and racism in education into three categories:

1. Evading racism. Equity-explicit discourse is divorced from institutional analyses or concrete discourse on race and racism.
 - This type of racism is a superficial response to diversity in classrooms, the activities are afterthoughts, something we do to bring in the culture of our minority students. We celebrate Chinese New Year or Cinco de Mayo but our classrooms are reflective of the dominant culture throughout the rest of the year. We do not weave diversity into our daily curriculum and celebrate multiculturalism throughout the lessons naturally. Instead we separate other cultures and reinforce the idea that they are different and this reinforces that they are less than. *(Editorial side note, and I know many will disagree with me, this is the exact reason I do not like celebrating things like Hispanic heritage month or Black history month. I see the need to call attention to the successes and histories of people not in the dominant culture, but I believe we should weave it into the daily lives of everyone, that we should not separate groups of people into months. Obviously this only works if we are ACTUALLY doing this and not just completely ignoring our minority students, which could be an end result. According to this article this activity actually reinforces racist hierarchies. For a much better explanation of this idea see **Joel Christian Gill**([clickable link](#))* or **Sincere Kirabo***([clickable link](#))*
2. Anti-racist racism. Racially inequitable practices and policies are actually masked as the solution to racism.
 1. *Neoliberal Racism and Policy*
 - Testing, Charters, School choice, and a divestment from public education fall into this subcategory. “Corporate driven testing policies affirm racial hierarchies of student success.”
 - School closures and school choice disproportionately and negatively affect working-class urban Black neighborhoods. White affluent students use school choice to leave struggling schools which starves the public schools of resources.
 - In this article post Katrina New Orleans is used as an example of what happens when Charters take over. After Katrina public schools were shuttered, White-dominated corporate charters took over and marginalized the Black school leaders. MAny charters preferred to recruit from outside of New Orleans, using organizations like TFA, and other alternative teacher recruitment forums, which recruited young, White teachers. This led to the displacement of veteran Black teachers. Another critique is that racist, deficit-minded pedagogies, masked as classroom management, limit opportunities to learn in charters.
 2. *Colorblind Racism*
 - The attempts made to equate colorblindness to equity leads to silence around racism which maintains and legitimizes racism. “Steeped in deficit thinking, color-blindness reduces any visible

racism to the actions of a few ignorant individuals. This allows systemic mechanisms of racism (e.g., tracking, curriculum, student surveillance) to be ignored as explanations for racial inequality and replaced by individual-based rationales (i.e., students of Color are lazy, behaviorally challenged, intellectually deficient)."

- "Masked as equity discourse, colorblind ideology is actually a form of racism that erases the contemporary, lived, and systemic oppression of communities of Color."

3. *Racist Policies of Designation*

- This section discusses language policies and practices as racializing forces that serve to perpetuate racial inequality. Through English-only campaigns and policies which exclude ELLs from school activities, racial and linguistic hegemony is reinforced.
- The research also "delineates over-representation of Black and Latinx students in special education as guided by assumptions of cultural deficits and pseudo-scientific placement processes. . ."

3. Everyday racism. Racism manifests at the micro or interpersonal level and is unrecognized or viewed as insignificant.

- This type of racism is seen in daily interactions. One strand of research looks into how some White teachers can be overtly racist, while others simply refuse to help improve the racial climate in schools.
- Another strand of research has provided student experiences of racism, from Korean and Korean-American students in the Midwest, Puerto Rican students in the Northeast and Midwest, to Native Hawaiians. This research shows how "nuanced, yet universal, racism is experienced by students of Color in the U.S." One example is the treatment of names of students of Color by teachers, and how that has been found to have psychological effects.
- Institutional racism often manifests itself in the "mundane, interpersonal interactions." "The researchers addressing covert racism often acknowledge the challenges of highlighting racism in what many have wrongly deemed postracial times."

The authors then discuss how research is confronting racism. Only 45 articles in their search emerged as articles that discuss confronting racism, a fact which they found "troubling". The authors place these articles into two categories: Articles that examine curriculum and pedagogy to develop racial literacy and studies that focus on resistance and resilience. Some key ideas from this section:

- The best way to develop racial literacy is for teachers to develop the ability and comfort with discussing race and racism. This highlights the need for PD on this topic.
- Some examples of pedagogy are given.
- Spaces for dialogue - Storytelling - Use of theater and arts to teach about human rights, immigration, and internalized racism.

The article ends with a call for an enhanced commitment to frank discussions of race and racism as well as critical analysis of and challenges to structural racism.