

THE DISPROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION DILEMMA

The Disproportional Representation Dilemma

A Meta-Synthesis

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Abstract

A disproportionate number of students, with specific identifiable characteristics like ethnic background, race and socioeconomic conditions are being erroneously referred and placed in special education and left out of programs for the gifted and talented due to problems within the systems of both regular and special education. With a shifting in the representations of the majority ethnic group and overall increases in the number of minorities attending public school, a system built with one norm (White, middle class) and matching leadership is unable to meet the needs of a diverse population of children. Teacher training programs and district in-services for current staffs need to address the diversity teachers will face in classrooms. New ways are needed to identify and measure abilities in order to help address individual student needs along a continuum of progress to build programs based on student strengths and not deficits identified through biased means. This paper is a metasynthesis of the literature surrounding the dilemma of disproportionate representation in special education with a specific focus on over representation.

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Introduction

1.1. Background

Disproportionality has been a topic of discussion in special education circles for nearly four decades. The idea is that specific groups of students are erroneously referred to or are represented in special education: either overrepresented, meaning too many students from specific groups (ethnic, socioeconomic) are included or underrepresented, meaning that too few from specific groups appear. The research is in agreement, even if the researchers are not, that this problem is acutely associated with the following co-conspirators: a profoundly White dominated education staff and philosophy, low socio-economic status, minority populations or attending school in specific regions of the United States. Researchers tend to have different opinions on the nature of these co-conspirators, that is to say some believe that disproportionality isn't a problem in and of itself but is rather another way to describe problems that have always been associated with education in the United States: the segregation of the seemingly uneducable (whether based on disability or personal bias). Still other researchers contend that the problem itself, disproportionality, is severely under represented due to the methods in which it is studied and the way the system trains professionals. Concerns to address the problem are rising due to a couple of changes forming on the horizon: middle class White students are losing their footing as the majority ethnic group but are still considered the control group by which all other student

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achievement is compared, more and more students are finding themselves on the under side of the poverty line and the educators that represent the fastest growing ethnic groups in our country are not entering the field at the same rate as the students. So where do we go from here? What are the implications of disproportionality on children, on teachers and on the systems of education?

1.2. Author's beliefs and experiences

I have been a part of the teaching community for over 25 years now. I have taught in suburban, urban and rural districts. I have seen the diversity that comes with being a classroom teacher and I have witnessed the cracking that allows children to be swept under the rug and forgotten – left for someone else to worry about in the future. I have never considered myself an expert and have witnessed first hand the chasm that forms between parents and administration when children don't fit the mold. Disproportionate representation concerns me for a number of reasons as I can relate to so many of the coconspirators and I wonder what it means to children in the long run as well as my continued career in education. Have I gone down the wrong rabbit hole? Do I want my grandchildren to be subject to this system? Is there any real difference I can make for my Native Alaskan students who are subject to a system that they didn't ask for, don't want and struggle to complete?

Previous to this study I had not stopped to consider my own families relationship with the educational system, how my background might contribute to bias in my teaching practices and how trends within education have affected all of it. And on some levels it has made me more sympathetic to the cause, so to speak. First, I am not wealthy nor do I come from wealth. I know what it is to stand in line at the food bank or the Welfare Office. I borrowed a lot of money

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to get my degree because my parents were poor. I also understand dysfunction within families due to poverty and alcohol abuse. And it has long been my belief that I really didn't become a teacher until I was a mother. I understand how hard it is to earn a living and rear children. On the other hand, I am White. I grew up in an all white community. The kids who went to special education were not seen or heard, even though they were White. I remember having to fight with the school system to be allowed to take college track courses because of who my parents were and the money we didn't have.

I didn't marry until after college but my husband attended college in his thirties. We had our oldest son tested for a learning disability when he was in 5th grade because his reading skills weren't kicking in and he was failing. He spent three years receiving support services for his problem and then exited the program and he continues to be a proficient reader. He has attended and is capable of competing at the university. My other two are still finishing high school, but they hate it with a red-hot passion. They are capable of the work but despise being shut up at a desk for 6-8 hours a day having to work on subjects and tasks that they see as unimportant and irrelevant. And they aren't wrong in their assessment. Our extended families are full of similar stories. They are all low to middle class, have kids with learning disabilities, emotional disabilities and struggle with just getting through high school. As I look us over, it seems to me that as partial benefactors of a system designed for White kids, we should be seeing more success than we are in terms of educational achievement and movement up the socioeconomic scale. Aren't all White kids supposed to go to college and achieve careers with 6 figure incomes? Are poverty and divorce rate the reason for the educational difficulties experienced by the children in our family? I know it may seem unrelated, but in my mind if people from within

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that “normed” group can’t make the system work, how it going to work for anyone else. Poverty and dysfunctional families aren’t anything new – most likely this is just one more level of discrimination. Imagine the same people described above only they are Alaska Native, Black or Hispanic.

Leap forward 20 years and I now reside in an Alaskan Bush village. All the social ills are present plus a few others but nothing dramatically different than anywhere else. For historical reasons, the school is not seen as a wholesome place. Many parents and older members of the community remember the days when children were spanked or beaten at the hands of the White teachers for speaking in their Native tongue or for some other cultural difference. Local community members seldom come to school for any reason (potluck, conferences, programs) despite my efforts to make it a warm and inviting place. I was sent here as just one more White face in a three decade string of teachers who never lasted more than a year or two at best. During my very first day of school here a student, then a 2nd grader, solemnly informed me that he couldn’t read or write and that I wouldn’t be able to make him. He was partly right.

In the seven years I’ve been here, the young man made some strides but topped out at the sixth grade level most noticeably in math and writing. Shortly into my first year, I noticed that many of my students (local Whites and Native alike) shared characteristics similar to those who have been diagnosed with learning disabilities. As a teacher these traits concerned me and made my job even more complicated (I was teaching all subjects for preschool – 11th grade with 2 part time aides) and my district wasn’t helping me find solutions. I appreciate that they didn’t blame me for it, but my lack of expertise wasn’t even mentioned as a possible scenario. I just wanted to try and figure out why the learning pace and progress of my students was so far behind the norm.

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I hadn't yet started my journey into special education, which since beginning my program has opened up lots of new dilemmas for me, but my group of failing students was the ignition switch that led me to my decision to pursue this path.

So what can I do? I had to work hard to get my own sons through school, how were my Alaskan Native students supposed to get through this system when their teacher, who is from the "norm" wasn't able to work it very well even for her own biological children? It hadn't escaped me that cultural differences had to account for many of the problems but I was even less sure how to sort that out given the political climate around this topic. I had turned to special education for help when my son was having trouble and it seemed to work, so I decided that was the route I would explore. After all, regular education didn't have any "tailored" programs to meet children's individual needs and I felt all my students needed a program that was designed for them so special education was the next logical step. I started looking for the loopholes in the system and I found it. It didn't take a whole lot of research to see that a student diagnosed with a general and undefined learning disability is where kids are sent when we can't get the regular system to work for them. Morally, I didn't see a problem with it at the time this and without realizing it I had walked into one of the oldest traps in the business! I found a way to identify a shortcoming or dysfunction (the verdict is still out on as to the legitimacy of it or not) that I thought I would ultimately be able to fix, maneuver around or accommodate through programs or strategies for which I would get training *but* I never stopped to ask myself if it was the right thing to do. My search, I imagined would be simple and straightforward, it's all about numbers, right? Well, not exactly. And as it turns out, I'm going to have to spend more time looking at defects within the system itself, as well as in me, rather than in my students. I don't have all the

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answers to solving the problems but I have a much better understanding of what's broken and what needs fixed. *"Be the change you wish to see in the World."* – Mahatma Gandhi.

1.3. Purpose of this meta-synthesis

As stated in my introduction, my purpose to this meta-synthesis is to gain a better understanding of my current teaching scenario. I have reviewed a lot of literature in hopes of better understanding the history and honestly, the idea of disproportionality as it pertains to under and over represented groups in special education (this paper focuses almost entirely on over representation); second I wanted to discover what theories exist as to if or why this is a concern to so many in the field; and finally, I wanted to review the ideas for remediating the situation. I still want to offer my students in Bush, Alaska, the best possible scenario in terms of educational opportunities. My goal was to search for answers to the following questions:

1. What is disproportionality? Does it exist?
2. How does it relate to or what affect does it have on education: special and regular?
3. Is this a legitimate problem that educators, parents and other professionals should consider as a priority to the educational setting or is it just political hype or agenda to distract from other more pertinent educational needs.
4. What aspect does culture, race, and/or economics play in disproportionality?
5. What are some solutions that have been offered or tried and what were the outcomes?
6. What solutions are being proposed for the future?

2. Methods

2.1. Selection criteria

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The fifty-three sources I used in this meta-synthesis met some or all of the following criteria for selection.

1. The articles explored the issues with and of disproportionality both over and under representation of students from minority groups (including first language and ELL learners), impoverished living conditions, and gender as compared with White/European middle class Americans.
2. The articles examined the impact of and the need for improvement with the following: identification procedures for potential special education students, the validity and bias of testing materials used for special education identification and demonstration of yearly growth in regular education, the need for changes or updates in research techniques, cultural programs for teacher preparation and in-service development for both general and special education teachers, policies surrounding second language students, placement choices for special education students and inclusive teaching practices.
3. The articles were from peer-reviewed journals.
4. The articles were published between 1960 and 2013.

2.2. Search procedures

I conducted database searches and ancestral searches to locate articles for this meta-synthesis.

2.2.1 Database searches

I conducted Boolean searches within the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, Ebscohost) using these exact search criteria:

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1. (“Over Identification”)
2. (“Over Identification”) and (“Alaska Native”)
3. (“Over Identification”) and (“Special Education”) and (“Alaska Native”)
4. (“Alaska Native”) and (“Special Education”)
5. (“Disabilities”) and (“Over Identification”) and (“Alaska Native”)
6. (“Disproportional”) and (“Special Education”)
7. (“Disproportional”) and (“Representation”) and (“Special Education”) and (“Alaska Native”)
8. (“Disproportional”) and (“Representation”) and (“Special Education”) and (“Native American”)
9. (“Disproportional”) and (“Representation”) and (“Special Education”) and (“Aboriginal”)
10. (“Disproportional”) and (“Representation”) and (“Special Education”) and (“Minorities”)

These searches resulted in a total of thirty-eight articles (Armstrong, 2012; Artiles, 1998; Artiles, 2003; Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher & Ortiz, 2010; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Barnhardt, 2001; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Bynoe, 1998; Cartledge, 2005; Chamberlain, 2005; Donovan & Cross, ed., 2002; Dorn, 2010; Ferretti & Eisenman, 2010; Fiedler, Chiang, Van Haren, Jargensen, Halberg & Boreson, 2008; Fierros, 2005; Fierros & Blomberg, 2005; Fitch, 2003; Fletcher & Navarrete, 2010; Ford, 2012; Fuchs, Fuchs & Stecker, 2010; Gold & Richards, 2012; Goodfellow, 2012; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Hawley & Ready, ed., 2003; Heller, Holtzman & Mesick, ed., 1982; McBee, Shaunessy & Matthews, 2012; Parette, 2005; Philpott, 2007; Robertson, Garcia, McFarland & Rieth, 2012; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006; Salend & Duhaney, 2005; Salend, Duhaney & Montgomery, 2002; Shealey, McHatton & Wilson, 2011;

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Sullivan, 2011; Taylor, 2005; Thurston & Navarrete, 2010; Vincent, Tobin, Hawken & Frank, 2012; Zaslavsky et al., 2011).

2.2.2 Ancestral searches

An ancestral search involves analyzing the reference lists of previously published works in order to locate literature relevant to one's topic of interest (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999). I conducted ancestral searches of the reference lists of the articles obtained through my database searches. These ancestral searches yielded fifteen additional articles that met the selection criteria (Artiles & Bal, 2008; Artiles, Thorius, Bal, Neal, Waitoller & Hernandez-Saca, 2011; Artiles, Trent, Hoffman-Kipp & Lopez-Torres, 1999; Brownwell, Sindelar, Kiely & Danielson, 2010; Klingner, Artiles, Kozleski, Harry, Zion, Tate, Duran & Riley, 2005; Lopez-Reyna, Snowden, Stuart, Baumgartner, & Maiorano, 2012; Naraian, 2010; Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori & Algozzine, 2012; Osgood, 2005; Plata, 2011; Rueda, 2011; Siperstein, Parker, Bardon & Widaman, 2007; Valle, 2011; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2012; Zieler, 2008).

2.3. Coding procedures

I used a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the 53 articles. This coding form was based on: (a) publication type; (b) research design; (c) participants; (d) data sources; and (e) findings of the studies.

2.3.1. Publication type

The journal articles were evaluated and classified based on publication type (e.g., research study, theoretical work, opinion piece/position paper, review of literature, annotated bibliography, guides or descriptive article). *Research studies* can be qualitative, quantitative, or a combination of both, and use a scientific method to gather and evaluate data. *Theoretical works*

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analyze already existing research in order to describe, develop, distill, or design theoretical construct. *Opinion pieces* reflect the author's position or opinion on a subject. *Reviews of literature* look at published literature on a particular topic, and may analyze that literature through summary, classification, and comparison. *Annotated bibliography* includes a list of articles on any subject with a brief synopsis of each piece of finished work. *Guides* are explanations on how to implement certain strategies, programs, policies or interventions. *Descriptive articles* explain a particular practice or phenomenon in-depth.

2.3.2. Research design

Empirical studies were further broken down by research design and were classified by quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods research. *Quantitative studies* can be measured objectively and involves the collection and analysis of numerical data in order to describe certain events or trends. *Qualitative research* focuses on interviews, conversations, and observations or language-based data. *Mixed methods* research utilizes both the quantitative and qualitative methods to present information within a single study.

2.3.3. Participants, data sources, and findings

I identified the participants within each article (e.g. developmentally handicapped students in inclusive setting, learning disabled students, 7th and 8th grade students, US school districts). I also categorized the type of data sources that were utilized with each study (e.g. observations, focus groups, surveys, intellectual disabilities, interviews). The summarized findings of each research study can be found in Table 2.

2.4. Data analysis

In analyzing the fifty-three articles, I employed a modified version of the

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Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method previously used by Duke (2011) and Duke and Ward (2009). I determined the significant statements within each article. For the purpose of this meta-synthesis, I then defined these significant statements that addressed issues related to: (a) disproportionality, overrepresentation and underrepresentation, and identification/misidentification; (b) judgmental disabilities or high incidence disabilities, low incidence disabilities and at risk factors; (c) inclusion/segregation and instructional consultation teams; (d) RTI and intervention; (e) ethnicity, culture, gender, socioeconomic and poverty factors, issues with English proficiency, location of residence; and (g) culturally responsive practices, preparation for diversity and identification of learners and difference. Then I generated a list of non-repetitive, verbatim significant statements with paraphrased formulated meanings, which represents my own understanding of each significant statement. I took the formulated meanings from all fifty-three articles and grouped them into themed clusters or “emergent themes.” These “emergent themes” represented the elemental essence of the entire body of literature.

3. Results

3.1. Publication type

Of the 53 articles that met my selection criteria, the publication type of each article is outlined in Table 1. 13 of the 53 articles (24%) included in this meta synthesis were research studies (Donovan & Cross, ed. 2002; Fierros & Blomberg, 2005; Fitch, 2003; Goodfellow, 2012; Gravois & Rosenfeild, 2006; Hawley & Ready, ed, 2003; Heller, Holtzman & Messick, ed, 1982; Lopez-Reyna, Snowden, Stuart, Baumgartner & Maiorano, 2012; McBee, shaunessy & Matthews, 2012; Siperstein, Parker, Bardon & Widaman, 2007; Thurston and Navarrete, 2010; Vincent, Tobin, Hawken & Frank, 2012; Zaslavsky et al., 2011). 3 of the articles (5%) were guides

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(Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori & Albozzine, 2012; Robertson, Barcia, McFarland & Rieth, 2012; Salend & Duhaney, 2005). 5 articles (9%) were descriptive works (Dorn, 2010; Ford, 2010; Fuchs Fuchs & Stecker, 2010; Naraian, 2012; Sullivan, 2011). 13 of the articles (24%) were literature reviews (Barnhardt, 2001; Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely & Danielson, 2010; Fierros, 2005; Osgood, 2005). 15 of the articles (28%) were theoretical works (Armstrong, 2012; Artiles, 1998; Artiles, 2003; Artiles & Bal, 2008; Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher & Ortiz, 2010; Artiles, Thorius, Bal, Neal, Waitoller & Hernandez-Saca, 2011; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Fiedler, Chiang, Van haren, Jorgensen, Halberg & Boreson, 2008; Fletcher & Navarrete, 2010; parette, 2005; Philpott, 2007; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006; Waitoller & Kozleski, 2006). 13 articles (24%) were opinion pieces or position papers (Ariles & Trent, 1994; Bynoe, 1998; Cartledge, 2005; Chamberlain, 2005; Ferretti & Eisenman, 2010; Gold & Richards, 2012; Klingner, Artiles, Kozleski, Harry, Zion, Tate, Duran & Riley, 2005; Plata, 2011; Rueda, 2011; Salend, Duhaney & Montgomery, 2002; Taylor, 2005; Vale, 2011; Ziegler, 2008). 1 article or (1%) was an annotated bibliography (Shealey, McHatton & Wilson, 2002).

Table 1

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Publication Type
Armstrong, 2012	Theoretical Work
Artiles, 1998	Theoretical Work
Artiles, 2003	Theoretical Work
Artiles and Bal, 2008	Theoretical Work
Artiles, Thorius, Bal, Neal, Waitoller & Hernandez-Saca, 2011	Theoretical Work
Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher & Ortiz, 2010	Theoretical Work
Artiles, Trent, Hoffman-Kipp & Lopez-Torres, 2000	Theoretical Work
Artiles & Trent, 1994	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Barnhardt, 2001	Review of Literature

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Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005	Theoretical Work
Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely & Danielson, 2010	Review of Literature
Bynoe, 1998	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Cartledge, 2005	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Chamberlain, 2005	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Donovan & Cross, ed., 2002	Research Study
Dorn, 2010	Descriptive Work
Ferretti & Eisenman, 2010	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Fiedler, Chiang, Van Haren, Jorgensen, Halberg & Boreson, 2008	Theoretical Work
Fierros, 2005	Review of Literature
Fierros & Blomberg, 2005	Research Study
Fitch, 2003	Research Study
Fletcher & Navarrete, 2010	Theoretical Work
Ford, 2012	Descriptive Work
Fuchs, Fuchs & Stecker, 2010	Descriptive Work
Gold & Richards, 2012	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Goodfellow, 2012	Research Study
Gravois & Rosenfeild, 2006	Research Study
Hawley & Ready, ed., 2003	Research Study
Heller, Holtzman & Messick ed., 1982	Research Study
Klingner, artiles, Kozleski, Harry, Zion, Tate, Duran & Riley, 2005	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Lopez-Reyna, Snowden, Stuart, Baumgartner & Maiorano, 2012	Research Study
Mc Bee, Shaunessy & Matthews, 2012	Research Study
Naraian, 2012	Descriptive
Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Albozzine, 2012	Guide
Osgood, 2005	Literature Review
Parette, 2005	Theoretical Work
Philpott, 2007	Theoretical Work
Plata, 2011	Opinion Piece/Position Paper

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Robertson, Garcia, McFarland & Rieth, 2012	Guide
Rueda, 2011	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Rueda & Windmueller, 2006	Theoretical Work
Salend & Duhaney, 2005	Guide
Salend, Duhaney & Montgomery, 2002	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Shealey, McHatton & Wilson, 2011	Theoretical Work with Annotated Bibliography
Siperstein, Parker, Dardon & Widaman, 2007	Research Study
Sullivan, 2011	Descriptive
Taylor, 2005	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Thurston & Navarrete, 2010	Research Study
Valle, 2011	Opinion Piece/Position Paper
Vincent, Tobin, Hawken & Frank, 2012	Research Study
Waitoller & Kozleski, 2006	Theoretical Work
Zaslavsky et al., 2011	Research Study
Ziegler, 2008	Opinion Piece/Position Paper

3.2. Research design, participants, data sources, and findings of the studies

Table 2

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Donovan and Cross, ed., 2002	Mixed Methods	Annual and Bi-annual Reports from OSEP (the Office of Special education Programs), OCR (the Office for Civil Rights) and NRC (National Research Council, 1982), NCES (National Center for Educational Statistics)	Risk Index, Odds Ratio, Composition Index, and surveys all over time	There is a wide variation in placement rates in the “judgmental” (LD, SLI, MR and ED) categories across states. These variations are substantially greater than in the low-incidence disability categories. There are inadequacy in the datasets since neither disability status

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				nor ethnicity is measured very precisely.
Fierros and Blomberg, 2005	Quantitative	2002-03 Charter Schools in California	California Dept. of Education enrollment records for special education students in regular schools verses charter schools (profit and non-profit).	California's charter schools account for 2.3% of the total student enrollment and even though the ratio of minority groups enrolled at regular schools and charter schools is in balance when comparing regular education number and special education it also implies that the racial disproportionality represented in regular schools holds true in charter schools.
Fitch, 2003	Qualitative	11 developmentally handicapped students who had experiences in and out of inclusive and/or segregated classrooms over a six year period.	Observation, audiotaping of semi structured interviews.	Four patterns emerged from the study: confidence verses resignation in regards to student's views of themselves was dependent upon the 3 settings; passing and covering up their learning disability to save identity; segregated classrooms were seen as a sanctuary or "back space" or a subculture; and reversals, that is to say changing their view of where they believed they actually belonged over the course of the study. Additionally, integration was not synonymous with

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				inclusion and students view of themselves was consistent with the current school's educational professionals.
Goodfellow, 2012	Qualitative	3 male and 1 female learning disabled as defined by SDSB; were completing 9 th grade and were 15 years of age and attended Westend Collegiate Vocational Institute; all identified with lower/middle socio-economic status; 2 reside in 2 parent homes, 1 with grandparents and one with mother only/no father contact	Photographic analysis and focus group discussions	Photographically the participants chose metaphoric interpretation of their SLD experiences while the focus discussions went directly to materials, student-teacher interactions. These 2 methods created a comprehensive view of how student's viewed themselves through the interrelation experiences as an LD student within the mainstreamed school environment.
Gravois and Rosenfeild, 2006	Qualitative	13 IC (Instructional Consultation) Team Project schools and 9 comparison (non-project) schools	Three indexes of disproportionality were considered: risk indexes, odds ratios and composition indexes were calculated and analyzed for the baseline and for 2 years of project implementation	After 2 years of implementation there was a significant decrease in the risk of minority students in IC Team project schools being referred to and placed in special education when compared to non-project schools. The odds of and composition indexes of minority students being referred dropped by 50% in the IC Project schools over the 2 year study.

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Hawley and Ready, ed., 2003	Qualitative	All regular US Public Schools are surveyed to gather statistics on minority groups that reflect their access to equal learning opportunities.	E&S survey (the Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report which gathers data from all US schools.)	Disparities in educational outcomes and in learning opportunities continue to exist among different types of students which continues to be a social problem. Tracking such information should continue to be a priority with the E&S survey as well as other tools.
Heller, Holtzman and Messick ed., 1982	Qualitative	6,040 US school districts which includes 54,082 schools or about 1/3 of the nations districts	1978 OCR surveys which included questionnaires to all district offices and to each school requesting specific information on student special education populations	National averages seem to be mostly affected by regional variations. The data clearly demonstrate that disproportionate assignment of students to special education programs depends on the region of the country, the particular state and district characteristics. From the state and regional patterns disproportionate EMR placements for minorities is greater and more consistent than in other programs.
Lopez-Reyna, Snowden, Stuart, Baumgartner and Maiorano, 2012	Quantitative	5 university field programs designed to prepare teachers for classroom with increasing numbers of minority students in an effort to close the disproportionality gap	Need surveys of students and faculty over 10 years	Teacher prep programs need to address: diversity, link course work to field work, collect stakeholder input and feedback, utilize multiple format formative and summative assessments of teacher candidates and the

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				preparatory programs themselves
Mc Bee, Shaunessy and Matthews, 2012	Mixed Methods	42 Florida schools with Plan Bs were compared to the remaining 25 Florida districts without such plans (policies for alternative identification procedures for remediating underrepresentation of minorities in gifted programs)	The 42 Plan B policies were compared to the National Benchmark. Propensity score matching was utilized.	In districts with Plan B policies the likelihood of identification for gifted programs increased by nearly 50% for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and as a by product for Black students as well. Continuing to implement Plan B policies is therefore recommended for all districts to address the underrepresentation issue.
Siperstein, Parker, Dardon and Widaman, 2007	Mixed Methods	5,837 randomly selected 7 th and 8 th graders from a variety of setting (urban, suburban, rural) and who are enrolled in different sized regular public schools	A survey was used to give numerical scales to the following dimensions of regular education students concerning students with ID (Intellectual Disabilities): Perceived Capabilities, Impact of Inclusion, Behavioral Intentions, Academic Inclusions and Non-academic Inclusion	Most youth (from the surveyed group) have limited access to students with ID in their classrooms and schools; believe that students with ID can participate if classes are nonacademic; view inclusion as both positive and negative; and prefer not to interact socially with a peer who is ID.
Thurston and Navarrete, 2010	Mixed Methods	236 women in economically poor families from 4 US States (9.9% Kansas, 38%	Small group and/or individual interviews (dependent on language abilities	Mothers of special needs children were older as a group than those without special needs children.

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		<p>Tennessee, 46.8% Texas and 5.3% Florida) who had been referred to agency with serves low-income families (JPTA, Adult Basic Education, state welfare or human services agencies) of which 136 were from rural areas.</p>	<p>and needs). Frequency counts were used for tabulation of results. Pearson's Chi-Square test was used to calculate children with special needs and those without.</p>	<p>White/Anglo represented most of the group without special needs children. 88% of the mothers with special needs children receive some sort of public assistance while 13% of them reported being employed. 21% of the women with special needs children had been receiving AFDC benefits for 5-10 years while the non-special needs mothers were represented by only 12% in this category. Mothers of special needs children were more likely to be divorced than any other marital status. 2 children was the median and the mode while of the total families 40% had at least one child with special needs. Of all mothers, 27% completed high school and 17% earned a GED. Of the mothers who did not complete either, 79% had children with special needs. Of those who responded "yes" to having a language, learning or behavior problem in 35% were mothers of children with special needs. 2.5% of the total group</p>
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				<p>expressed a desire to not be involved with child's school. Mothers of special needs children reported 71% good and 24% excellent parent-teacher relationships. 40% of the rural mothers had children with special needs with 68% of this group being White/Anglo. Those receiving services were most likely White/Anglo and only 27% of this (rural) group had completed high school due to family responsibilities. Educational interventions with females from poor or rural or females in special education must focus on helping girls stay in school and on life and employment skills.</p>
Vincent, Tobin, Hawken and Frank, 2012	Mixed Methods	155 elementary and 46 middle schools in the US that used the SWIS-CICO system of recording during the 2009-2010 school year and who recorded overall enrollment by ethnicity, were public school that agreed to share their data	Disaggregated discipline data for race/ethnicity and behavioral risk levels	Hispanic-American and White students were underrepresented among students with multiple discipline referrals and African-American students were overrepresented. African-American students were overrepresented in receiving secondary support/intervention services in elementary

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				school but less likely to receive support at the middle school level. Across all the schools, race/ethnicity emerges as statistically significant in predicting access to secondary level support/intervention services. Implementation of secondary level supports/interventions did not decrease discipline disparity.
Zaslavsky et al., 2011	Mixed Methods	Families with Limited English Proficiency and New Immigrants with Limited English Proficiency	ACS (US Census Bureau's American Community Survey), DoEd reported number of students being assessed ELP by states.	The 3-year ACS estimates outweigh and provide more stable and precise numbers than the 1-year when making estimates for resource allocations for ELP students. State provided data needs improvement in reporting criteria in order to be a more reliable source.

3.2.1. Research design

2 of the 13 studies (15%) used a quantitative design (Fierros and Blomberg, 2005; Lopez-Reyna, Snowden, Stuart, Baumgartner and Maiorano, 2012). 5 of the 13 studies (39%) used a qualitative design (Fitch, 2003; Goodfellow, 2012; Gravois and Rosenfeld, 2006; Hawley and Ready, ed., 2003; Heller, Holtzman and Messick ed., 1982). The remaining 6 studies (46%) utilized a mixed method research design (Donovan and Cross, ed., 2002; Mc Bee, Shaunessy

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and Matthews, 2012; Siperstein, Parker, Dardon and Widaman, 2007; Thurston and Navarrete, 2010; Vincent, Tobin, Hawken and Frank, 2012; Zaslavsky et al., 2011).

3.2.2. Participants and data sources

In the thirteen research studies included in this meta-synthesis data was collected from a variety of sources. Four of the studies (30%) relied on data collected by government agencies (i.e. Dept of Ed., OCR, US Census Bureau, NCR) which included random samples of US schools of various sizes and from various locations (i.e. rural, urban and suburban) from which specific pieces of data could be isolated and compared with larger statistics (i.e. number of Black students labeled LD compared with total enrollment for Black students; ELP students compared to Hispanic LD students) (Donovan and Cross, ed., 2002; Hawley and Ready, ed., 2003; Heller, Holtzman and Messick ed., 1982; Zaslavsky et al., 2011) . One study of the 13 (7%) focused on trends in enrollment of diagnosed special education students within charter schools in California (Fierros and Blomberg, 2005). Another one or 7% compared the data on the mothers of students (both regular and special education students) from very low socio-economic groups (Thurston and Navarrete, 2010). Another (7%) collected data from and compared factors from 42 of the 67 Florida School Districts that had developed specific plans for identifying students for Gifted & Talented programs (Mc Bee, Shaunessy and Matthews, 2012). Two of the studies (15%) collected data from students about their educational settings' (segregated special education, inclusion and mainstreaming) effect on self image (Fitch, 2003; Goodfellow, 2012; Siperstein, Parker, Dardon and Widaman, 2007). Three of the studies (23%) collected data based on students taking part in specific classroom models (Gravois and Rosenfeild, 2006; Lopez-Reyna, Snowden, Stuart, Baumgartner and Maiorano, 2012; Vincent, Tobin, Hawken and Frank, 2012).

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Statistical data (i.e. race, gender, immigration status, ELL classification, behavioral referrals) were collected and then aggregated and/or disaggregated and then used to calculate and identify trends that indicate disproportional representation in 8 of the 13 (61%) studies (Donovan and Cross, ed., 2002; Fierros and Blomberg, 2005; Gravois and Rosenfeld, 2006; Hawley and Ready, ed., 2003; Heller, Holtzman and Messick ed., 1982; Thurston and Navarrete, 2010; Vincent, Tobin, Hawken and Frank, 2012; Zaslavsky et al., 2011). Other strategies used included one study (7%) that gathered data through observations (Fitch, 2003); six other studies (46%) collected data from surveys (Donovan and Cross, ed., 2002; Hawley and Ready, ed., 2003; Heller, Holtzman and Messick ed., 1982; Lopez-Reyna, Snowden, Stuart, Baumgartner and Maiorano, 2012; Siperstein, Parker, Dardon and Widaman, 2007; Zaslavsky et al., 2011); another 2 of the studies (15%) used interviews (Fitch, 2003; Thurston and Navarrete, 2010) and 1 study (7%) utilized photographic analysis and focus group discussions (Goodfellow, 2012).

3.2.3. Findings of the studies

The findings in the 13 research studies used in this meta-synthesis can be summarized as follows:

1. Statistics show that there are disproportionalities that follow the lines of ethnic group, socio-economic status and gender. Ethnic and socio-economic groups show regional trends surrounding the disproportional number of Black and Hispanic students (specifically those identified as ELD) who are labeled with a high incidence disabilities like LD or emotional disturbance as compared to White students. Across the board a male student is much more likely than a female one to receive this same label and this factor isn't limited by ethnicity or socio-economic placement. The

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- numbers also suggest that Black and Hispanic students are underrepresented in programs for the gifted & talented, again this phenomenon appears to be a factor in schools within certain regions or geographic locations.
2. Intervention supports for students with discipline referrals, when provided early, made a difference in the trajectory of the student's school experience. There was also indication that Black students were less likely to receive timely support services than White or Hispanic students. The same trend is visible for Black students labeled emotionally disturbed as well.
 3. Low socio-economic resources, lack of access to education and rural geographical locations are risk indicators and affect the likelihood of a woman having children with high incidence disabilities.
 4. Students are negatively affected by labels and access is limited to regular education environments. Special education students are negatively affected by the philosophies and expectations of the adults in their educational environment when inclusion is not synonymous with least restrictive environment. Students with high incidence disabilities receive less help and support in inclusive classrooms where the teacher disagrees philosophically with the practice.
 5. Charter schools can recruit and deny membership unlike regular public schools and therefore are able to stabilize special education numbers in order to maintain positive achievement trends.
 6. There is statistical evidence that shows utilizing specific teaching cohorts, programs and teacher education models has a direct effect on balancing disproportionality.

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Instructional Consultation teams show a significant decrease in the number of referrals made for ethnic students affected by potential high incidence disabilities like LD. Educating the monochromatic teachers that staff most US schools early on to prepare for diversity alleviates the number of ELD students who later are referred for LD. Having a specific plan for identifying students for gifted and talented programs significantly evened the odds for students from underrepresented ethnic groups.

3.3. Emergent themes

Six themes or clusters of ideas presented themselves from the 53 resources analyzed for this meta-synthesis. (a) Statistical analysis in support of disproportionality shows evidence that many groups (males, Blacks, low socio-economic, and CLD) are being overrepresented in high incidence disabilities while some groups (Blacks, CLD, low socio-economic) are being underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented. (b) Research methods need to be improved for analyzing disproportionality and allow for more complicated and wider views of student groups including how disability is defined, identified and studied along with the added cultural and ethnic layers of students and their communities. (c) Segregation continues to be a debate within the profession in both general and special education. (d) Ethnicity of educational professionals, how these professionals are trained and in-serviced and the practices/strategies/job descriptions play a dynamic role in the disproportionality dilemma. (e) Inclusion or least restrictive environment also contributes to be debate. Success of this movement from the eyes of students is mixed but for the most part is unsuccessful. From the literature it would seem that when it's done well, it has significant positive affect on the student with the disability but does little to change the attitudes of the regular education students around them. (f) There appears to

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be nothing as dramatic on the success or failure of students than the combination of gender, socio-economic status and familial cultural beliefs and practices.

Table 3

Theme Clusters	Formulated Meanings
Disproportionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The norming group is always White and middle class ● Different implies defect from norm ● Overrepresentation is a statistical phenomenon that shows a higher percentage of a specific group of students in special education than the percentage of that group in the population as a whole. In most cases this term refers to high incidence disabilities and most commonly affects students who are male, Black, Hispanic, CLD, ELL ● Underrepresentation is the opposite of overrepresentation. In this case the percentage of students in specific group are much lower when compared with the percentage of that group in the population as a whole. ● Once a student from an overrepresented group has started the referral process, the majority continue onto an IEP and few, once on an IEP and/or the student is placed in a segregated environment, return to the main stream program. ● Historically underserved groups refers to students from overrepresented groups who have demonstrated failure as a group over time
Philosophical Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Medical science verses social science study methods ● Incorporating a students various cultural backgrounds into the system ● Finding alternate avenues to assess IQ and achievement ● Allow for continuums or spectrums within regular education ● Discontinue seeking the dysfunction in the differences in minority cultures by comparing it to one overshadowing majority ● Engage in cultural reciprocity
Segregation and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Culture is a complex dynamic of all people ● Each person is a part of multiple cultures and these cultures sometimes overlap ● Understanding and applying historical cultural priorities based on student groups represented in the classroom and less on that of the teacher – overlaps with cultural reciprocity ● Inclusion seeks to limit the segregation of special education students from the mainstream or regular education classroom and provide special education students with the least restrictive environment possible ● Recent laws passed in several states eliminate dual language programs for English language learners

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<p>Educational personnel and methods</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Majority of teachers, administrators and special education providers are White ● Personnel from minority groups entering the field doesn't come close to keeping pace with the amount of students entering the system from those same groups ● Teacher training programs do not meet the demands of an ever increasingly diverse student population ● Teachers refer students for special education due to inability to communicate with students who exhibit one or more of the common risk factors ● Attitudes regarding students with intellectual difficulties are still primarily grouped as low functioning instead of viewing as a continuum of abilities. ● Regular education still pushes for segregation of students with language and intellectual difficulties
<p>Risk Factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The highest and most reliable indicators for special education referral or school failure is a) gender; b) student's socio-economic background; c) ethnic background and d) competency with the English language ● A mother's educational background, poverty level and geographical location have a direct affect on children's educational experiences ● A students and subsequently the student's family's ability to speak and communicate competently in the English language and reciprocally the teacher's inability to communicate with people from diverse backgrounds complicates the educational process for students
<p>RTI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Most common strategy for equalizing disproportional representation by utilizing teams comprised of families and professionals to analyze and offer support services for students who are showing signs of low achievement or behavioral concerns while still in the regular educational setting ● A multi-tiered system that encompasses both regular and special education staff ● Provides support to students through scientifically based programs and data collection on progress through constant monitoring ● Testing information or progress monitoring are not sufficient cause to prove a learning disability ● Requires redefining the roles of educational staff involved ● Requires resources for staff and students
<p>Disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are basically categorized two different ways ● Judgmental or high incidence disabilities categorize students with labels like LD (learning disabled), ED (emotionally disturbed), and ID (Intellectually disabled) ● Judgmental categories are applied based on test scores and other psychological tests when a discrepancy can be proven between the students ability and the level of achievement. This process can easily be influenced by the bias found in the tests, testers and teachers.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Markers of low incidence disabilities can easily be confused with other conditions or situations such as student’s inability to perform according to the cultural expectations of the school or the communication styles and differences between student and staff.
Culturally and Linguistically Different	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● CLD ● Term to describe a large population of minority students who make up the mass of students represented in the overrepresentation of students in high incidence disability categories like LD

4. Discussion

4.1. Disproportionality continues to be a factor in special education.

“Disproportionality or disproportionate representation is defined as “the extent to which membership in a given (ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic or gender) group affects the probability of being placed in a specific disability category” (Oswald et al., 1999, p. 198 as cited in Artiles et al., 2010, pg 279). The literature positively indicates that disproportionate representation is an issue of concern for a variety of groups (i.e. males, Blacks, Alaska Native/American Indian) specifically in the categories under the umbrella of high incidence disabilities: LD (learning disability, non-specific), ED (emotionally disturbed), EBD (emotional and behavioral disorder, non-specific), MMR (mild mental retardation), and ID (intellectual disability) (Artiles et al., 2010; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Fletcher & Narrete, 2010; Ford, 2012; Klingner et al., Artiles, 2005; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006; Salend et al., 2002; Sullivan, 2011; Zaslavsky et al., 2011) and in point of fact, no such issue applies to low incidence disabilities.

The implications of this practice, if it is a conscientious play, is that too many students’ educational tracks are being negatively influenced and failure rates among these overrepresented groups are continue to be extremely high despite special education intervention. The research has led me to believe that disproportionality, most specifically overrepresentation, is the poster

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child for the cancer that plagues the educational system as a whole. It is rooted in some of the most controversial topics of the last 6 decades (i.e. race, ethnicity, culture, teacher effectiveness). And it is the edginess of attitudes and philosophies around the groups themselves (each one being an independent issue) that allows the system to maintain its convoluted status quo without really having to deal with any of it and thus conversely, enhances the negative approaches and attitudes that surround students of these subgroups. Students who are disproportionately represented, it is claimed by the special education departments across the nation, suffer from some very vague conditions that require unique placement and support services. Ultimately in the end obtaining a solid education, or at least the “regular one,” is unlikely and will remain so until the issues surrounding race, culture, gender and poverty are viewed appropriately then disproportional representation should actually resolve itself. The following cluster themes are the primary factors cited by the authors in the literature analyzed that directly explain and impact this phenomenon of disproportionality.

4.2. Philosophical Approaches

For thirty some years this issue has been considered (studied and analyzed) with the standard issue research lens of difference, in other words: every child is compared to the White, middle class norm. This approach has gained very little insight into solving the problem but has given the illusion that the problem is one that developed with the invention of special education. “When framed in this way, the problem is reduced to a discussion of technical issues related to presumed intrinsic child deficits with little attention to contextual, historical or institutional issues (Klingner & Artiles et al., 2005, pg 5). By reforming and utilizing new research methods similar to those found in the social sciences rather than in the medical sciences a better view and

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understanding of disproportionality can be achieved. The topic can be studied from a new platform that can consider the how and why. “When does difference count, under what conditions, in what ways, and for what reasons? A research program aimed at understanding the disproportionate representation problem using a sociocultural approach would map out trajectories of human development in complex sociocultural matrixes of influence (Artiles, 1989, pg. 35).

Artiles, and others, are offering educators a new lens to look through when viewing our students. Our system, historically aiming to achieve colorblindness, hasn't yielded the results the political powers that be are hoping for but the development of a matrix of norms from which children can move through and across is a much more dynamic representational way to consider children – after all they are not created from cookie cutters. Establishing alternate and unbiased avenues for assessing student strengths and weaknesses based on who they are and what they want provides a system sensitive to their real needs instead of applying the mold to find deficits. Our current approach assumes that everyone wants to be like the cookie cutter and that it is an educator's job to produce cookies from one specific mold. In reality we need a system that allows for unlimited molds – that takes into account the culture and worldview of the individual child.

4.3. The Illusion of Desegregation

Diversity is currently one of those ideas that is offered in theory without a real understanding of how it works socially or realistically because it isn't found anywhere in the natural world. That somehow, magically, by ignoring our differences and “desegregating homogeneous communities” we somehow create an equitable system for all. Disproportionality

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proves this philosophy to be the sham it is. Special education students and overrepresented students within special education demonstrate that we are still segregating various groups based on race, culture, gender and socio-economic factors. Studies also show that once children are segregated out, they seldom return to the mainstream classroom or curriculum. They often build new subgroups or cultures that add to the complicated mix and ultimately they are still denied the arbitrary, yet free, American education based on the color of their skin, the misunderstandings of their communication systems, their gender and inability to financially complete.

The reality is that we all belong to multiple cultures and many times these cultures overlap. Having teachers and other education staff prepared to engage with a diverse group of people means sharing in cultural reciprocity. I don't have to give up my beliefs and standards and neither do you. If we strive to understand the cultures that our students take part in we can better understand what motivates them, what they want to get out of the education system and who they hope to end up as when they are an adult. We have to accept that some people are happy being farmers or fishermen and that all students are not destined for college or university nor should they be whether they are capable or not. I don't believe that all people can learn to read – as established and defined by the White, middle class norm or as demonstrated by IQ scores.

4.4. Educational Employment Opportunities – A World without Diversity

It is unfortunate, but the statistics on the ethnicity of the educational staff across the US is predominately, as in 90% or better, White and 80% or more are female (Snyder, 2002 as cited in Klingner, 2002, pg 18). The literature also points out the way in which teachers are prepared, whether regular or special education, does not prepare them for the diversity they will find in

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their classrooms. Current statistics indicate that the student populations, especially among students of Hispanic origins, are increasing rapidly and will very soon represent the majority. The number of teachers entering the field who share this ethnic background, however, is not keeping up with the demand. In fact statistics show that the least “qualified” staffs are those that serve the Hispanic population. This same pattern is found in the Native Alaskan/American Indian populations. It doesn’t take much extrapolation to see that overrepresentation is quite possibly due to the classroom teacher’s inability to deal with her clientele. It might help if the artificial demands were not already so high, but when the culmination comes together it isn’t hard to believe that teachers are referring children with whom they have no common ground – especially language – for special educational testing. It also isn’t hard to see why regular classroom teachers also advocate strongly for segregated services given the workload that already exists in classrooms. So where does that leave us? Artiles bears out some assumptions that will aid teachers in addressing rationally with the differences they find among their students. “Difference is intrinsic and not a comparison.” (Artiles, 1998) He goes on to point out that “...the source of difference is with the individual. However...difference is a comparative term...Minority students have been historically seen as different, although the reference points used to make the comparisons have rarely been articulated explicitly” (Minow, 1990 as cited in Artiles, 1989, pg. 33). “White culture represents the norm against which comparisons are made in our society and that minority people have been traditionally defined for what they are *not* (i.e. not white) rather than for what they are” (emphasis included, Heath, 1995 as cited in Artiles, 1989, pg. 33). The second assumption is that “the observer can see without a perspective” in other words “the observer does not possess a viewpoint” (Minow as cited in Artiles, 1989, pg.

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33). It stands to reason that a teacher is not aware of the assumptions he holds when looking at the difficulties a minority student experiences in his classroom. Utilizing classroom observations and team approaches provides for additional prescriptions that are based on a variety of perspectives. Unfortunately, with the number of teachers who are White, it maybe difficult to find other perspectives but rather shades. The third assumption is related, “other perspective are irrelevant” meaning “the perspective of the person being judged is not relevant or is already considered by the observer. It is also assumed that the observed person’s worldview is not related to how others treat him or her” (pg. 34).

How do we increase the diversity of the classroom when the staff is monochromatic? Reinstate second language support programs, hire aides from with in the local cultural communities represented in the classroom, special education staff work alongside and inside the same classroom, bring in family volunteers from those represented in the classroom. “...enlisting volunteers to serve as reading tutors...invite parents and others in the neighborhood to share their expertise...on a number of topics (Klingner et al., 2005, pg 15). Teachers need to seek out and find ways to broaden their own minds, they must understand the person who already lives there and remember that he does not possess a wide angle lens. “Practitioners work in complex milieus and thus, the application of research knowledge requires that they change what they think and do and transform the context in which they work (pg 15). Teachers need to be prepared in their training and inservice to recognize culturally sensitive ways of sharing knowledge and they must interact and become aware of, if not familiar with, the cultures represented in their classrooms.

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This allows “students to find relevant connections among themselves, the subject matter, and the tasks they are asked to perform” (pg 22).

This kind of collaboration is personally risky and requires a new frame of mind for teachers. In Bush, Alaska, this idea of integrating local culture into the curriculum and local people into classrooms is not new at all but it has still failed in the big picture. Some pockets or locations have done better than others for sure, but overall the feel and approach to educating in the Bush just hasn't changed. Teachers are not members of large staffs and they are isolated. They lack even the shades of perspectives that come from working with larger monochromatic staff. Most places don't have as much as a special education teacher on staff at each site. Locals generally don't mind accepting school jobs but their attendance and productivity are inconsistent with most standardized work ethics. Bush teachers are going to have to dig deeper and widen the search and scope of the situation in which they find themselves simply due to how absolutely limited it is. To “bridge the borders between their home and school cultures, recognize and understand the social milieus, and build on the knowledge and skills that their students bring with them to school learning” (pg. 22). This theme is the essence of the problem that surrounds rural Native Alaska.

4.5. Who is at Risk?

The research is consistent on the risk factors associated with disproportional representation, these factors have not changed over the years and preclude the desegregation movement. Students, then and now, who come from low socio-economic and impoverished homes, are not of the ethnic majority and, even more likely, if they are Black, Hispanic or Alaska Native/American Indian, if they come from rural settings and/or lack at least basic conversational

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skills in English these students will fail academically and more than likely will be referred for special education services as students who have a learning disability or behavioral one. More recently, gender is an additional risk factor that is showing up in the statistics. If you are male, your 150% more likely to be considered and labeled intellectually disabled or emotionally disturbed no matter your ethnic background – even if your White. A more detailed look at some of the risk factors revealed that when a student's mother is from an economically deprived, rural background and whether or not she completed school and had learning disabilities of her own, she is more likely going to be divorced, live below the poverty level and will have at least one child that is learning disabled. A mother's educational level, income level, residential area and access to support services is a clear indicator as to the academic achievement her children will experience. These children, regardless of ethnic background, will be overrepresented in special education categories for high incidence disabilities.

I agree with many of the authors that it's going to take systemic changes to create successful scenarios for all students. A system must have the foundational understanding that student's be allowed a range of success. One of the glaring issues in my community is that nothing we teach at the high school level has any bearing on real life even for my college bound students. They constantly complain of the irrelevance and beg for real projects like rebuilding a snow machine or sewing a kuspuk. The system is so bogged down in college preparations and achievement testing that there isn't time for anything else. The study on mothers of students who were in overrepresented groups pointed out that we must keep girls in school longer – it seems to me the most natural way to do that is bring back home economics. It isn't that these individuals aren't capable of higher order thinking or more difficult subject matter like Algebra,

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for the most part they aren't interested in it and they need something in which they can invest their time and talent and see the immediate relationship and application. Instead of learning about childcare from a book, have students job shadow midwives, nurses and small daycare providers build anatomy and math into it. How about apprenticeships for low income students so that they can earn and supplement their families income (number one reason for dropping out) or build a college fund while gaining academic credit? The solutions are not going to be resolved with the same old arbitrary curriculum, policies, procedures and practices.

4.6. Response to Intervention (RTI) – A complicated and ambiguous model

I have had a love-hate relationship with the concept of RTI since I first heard of it. In essence it really seems like a great idea and in many places where it has been better formed and applied, statistics are showing it makes a difference in the number of referrals to special education for all types of students, but especially for those who are in the overrepresented risk groups. A primary factor in eliminating overrepresentation risks must be for the teacher to consider herself and the methods and materials being utilized. “We hold that in general the field of special education has not adequately considered prevention and intervention strategies at the general education level as a viable means of addressing disproportional representations (Klingner, 2005 pg 4). A common view of classroom teachers is “that special education placement results in the provision of additional resources and support and should be considered a benefit (Klingner, et al., 2005). So why is this a problem? Students in special education may be denied access to the general education curriculum and, particularly if they have been placed inappropriately, may receive services that do not meet their needs. “...disability labels stigmatize students as inferior, result in lowered expectations, potentially separate students from

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peers and lead to poor educational and life outcomes, improper placement is a great concern (Heller, Holtzman & Messick, 1982; Patton, 1998 both as cited in Klingner et al., 2005). Most well-meaning teachers don't realize that they carry the perspective that students with disabilities are seen as an extra burden and generally uneducable (consistent with last theme cluster). This attitude is transferred through the school environment and influences the materials, the extra time and effort teachers put into special needs kids. So RTI is a model that utilizes checkpoints so a teacher can make sure that good instructional practices and resources have been used before pushing a child into special education. RTI utilizes a team approach that focuses on checking students understanding levels in comparison to teaching practices and it places students in tiered levels based on the level of need. It requires regular education and special education to work closely together. On the lower end tiers, regular education takes the lead and on the upper tiers, special education becomes the team leader.

RTI holds a lot of potential and I have been using my districts procedures for it. So far I haven't seen a lot of growth, but part of the tier 2 services applied were ineffective (online tutoring with college students in the lower 48). Other internal programs, like Read Naturally, Read Live have improved my students oral reading fluency and raised lexile scores of my struggling readers. One of the factors that neutralizes this model and renders it ineffective in my school is the lack of "team." There is only me. – I am the regular education teacher and special education teacher for the elementary students in my building. We have a few people who line up tutors, pick out new prepackaged programs and track progress monitoring or CBM scores, but there isn't any coming together of the minds. These tiers are generally prepackaged routes that a student moves through depending on their level or lack of success. It would be even

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more effective if there were 2-3 additional hands to implement these tiers. It's amazing how just changing the face of the teacher can change the response of the child. The distance delivery was too impersonal to counteract the lack of hands. The model allows for some changes and different influences that might not otherwise be considered.

4.7. Judgmental Disabilities

Within the umbrella of special education is a category of disabilities that are known as the “judgment” disabilities or high incidence disabilities. Their manifest differences are not easily distinguished and, most often than not, they are not related to a medically observable condition like the characteristic behaviors or traits of students with low incidence disabilities. Judgmental disabilities are to some degree based on the judgment or interpretation of special education staff and various professionals like psychologists and speech pathologists. “The construct of eligibility for high incidence disabilities is tied to IQ measurement means that cultural and linguistic minorities continue to be more likely to be found deficient, since there is little doubt that these measures reflect the cultural, social, and linguistic knowledge of society’s mainstream (Klingner et al., 2005, pg 7) Students are given an IQ test along with additional achievement tests by a psychologist or specialist with whom the child has had no experience. The scores are calculated, interpreted and then compared to an arbitrarily decided upon number (by states or districts) that arbitrarily proves or disproves a discrepancy. When it is discovered a discrepancy is present then we can call it a “learning disability.” There are several problems with this formulae: for minority groups the tests and test givers have proven to be riddled with bias. According to the National Research Council’s most recent inquiry into the matter stated that “consideration of assessment issues, called for a focus on children’s intervention needs rather

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than a search for intrinsic disability, and for an end to the requirement for IQ tests as a “primary criterion” for eligibility” (Donovan & Cross, 2002, p. 313). This same report also stated that “children’s academic achievement falls along a continuum, the cut-off points for “disability” or “giftedness” are “artificial and variable” (pg 26). All that is testing proves is whether or not a group of students does or doesn’t do well in the culture of school; it doesn’t prove a deficit in ability to think, process information or communicate. “The same child can perform very differently depending on the level of teacher support, and aggressive behavior can be reversed or exacerbated by effective or ineffective classroom management. In practice, it can be quite difficult to distinguish internal child traits that require the ingoing support of special education from inadequate opportunity or contextual support for learning and behavior (pg 5). One of the main reasons for overrepresentation is this very issue. Referring theses students to special education (as noted in the previous cluster) in the teacher’s unenlightened mind, means she is getting access to support services for students who apparently really need it. So in actuality does this ambiguous condition exist or is it in fact a dumping ground for all the children who cannot assimilate to the culture of schools? Simultaneously, there are kids with real identifiable defects and unfortunate conditions that keep them from being able to be a part of the regular educational setting and they need access to a fair and appropriate education because historically they have been denied it and often institutionalized – those with disabilities under the umbrella of low incidence. But when we overload the system with children who really aren’t disabled we depletes the resources available to those who truly are and distract the focus from the real issues that come with being physical or intellectually disabled. I do not suggest that this group of overrepresented students be left to their own devices or worse yet to the mercy of the system

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within they find themselves – which in many ways is what has happened historically. But it would seem that a new category has emerged that describes their situation much better - Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students (CLD) – and with it researchers, politicians and other leaders in the educational field can create a system of supports and allocate resources of services that are more appropriate to their needs.

This recently developed term, CLD, describes the mass of students who don't seem to fit into traditional categories. These students tend to find themselves at considerable risk for being referred for special education services because their cultural and language bases are different from those of the teacher or school administration. Students who already carry the label ELL most likely fit into this group but the label isn't limited to English language learners but refers to the larger mass of students who use dialects that teachers and administrators consider inferior. "Many culturally and linguistically diverse students are isolated in schools (mainly low-socio economic and aimed at low-track students) that provide a compensatory education that is merely the regular curriculum "repeated, broken into meaningless segments, or 'dumbed down'" (Strickland & Ascher, 1996 as cited in Klingner, et al., 2005 pg. 4). These students are being erroneously identified as having deficits and are in fact just being themselves and no one sees the manifestation that the teacher describes in any setting other than school. By labeling and/or segregating these students we have just isolated them from their peers and denied them access to the "regular" curriculum. Resource allocation is one of the biggest concerns because these students typically attend school in economically depressed communities.

The truth is the group of kids that plague our system with failure; they give us a bad name because they insist on failing and their families proved to be little or no help in the process of

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remediating the situation. This group seems uneducable but clearly they do not belong in special education. This group represents the need for serious changes in the educational system as described by Artiles and others. The rate at which this group is expanding signals a real change in the face of our student populace as a whole. The students in this country, before we consider physical disabilities (what has been referred to as low incidence), is comprised of enormous diversity in common themes on so many levels: languages, customs, religions, race, ethnic backgrounds, the composition of families, sexual orientations, residential sizes and economic strata. It has come to be my philosophy that special education needs to remain faithful to its original purpose – that is to secure and provide the resources that will provide these students with as regular an education as possible based on very specific needs. It seems that other provisions need to be made for all those students who find themselves in the CLD category as promoted by the authors cited in this meta-synthesis – better research methods, diversifying the teaching staff, preparing the teaching staff with culturally sensitive methods and approaches, recreating schools to practice cultural reciprocity, to utilize teaching teams, to change special education referral process, redefine the high incidence categories, appropriately fund all educational programs not just ones where test scores are high, change the face of testing and tracking students so it reflects true learning instead of providing a picture of system biases, reinstate dual language programs and make room in our schools and educational teams for all students and the people and cultures that comes with them. “The genesis of disproportionate representation is located beyond the borders of special education and requires a solid understanding of the intersection of culture, learning, disability, and the socio-historical constitution of educational processes and outcomes” (Klingner, 2005, pg 8).

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5. Conclusion

In my quest to understand the issues surrounding disproportionality within special education I stumbled upon some hard truths. First, there is no longer a majority that is White and middle class – the foundation of educational philosophy that there is “a regular educational” system that works for all students except for those identified as disabled never really existed and with the waves of new immigration is unable to hide the children it fails. The previous epiphany relates to the next that disproportionality is a problem that predates special education and in actuality is a problem firmly and historically rooted in “regular education”. Disproportionality, politically renamed after desegregation, is the modern equivalent to segregation and by pushing it under the rug of special education we deny students with real disabilities access the resources and services they need and waste resources on resources and services that CDL students really don’t need. Furthermore, if you are male, and/or poor, from a rural location or desegregated location, Black, Hispanic, Alaska Native or Native American, have difficulty communicating with standard American English you are more likely, in fact up to as much as 150% more likely, to be referred for special education testing as a student with an ambiguous learning disability. If your mother resides in a rural location, is impoverished, and didn’t finish high school you are at risk to be identified as a student with a learning disability. I also discovered that in my zealous, however arguably and somewhat misguided, efforts to improve the academic situation for my struggling students that I have committed the very sin I now must advocate against and must examine whether or not I have put upon them labels that could hinder their social interactions with or even isolate them from their peers. Since I deliver the special education services in my little corner of the world, I do know they have the same access to the curriculum as all my other students and I have gained the liberty to modify and make accommodations so that they can

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compete with their peers academically but I cannot see what social changes may be happening as a result of it outside school. This assurance of access doesn't happen for the thousands of other potentially mislabeled kids attending giant, bloated schools in suburban and urban areas or in rural areas where the philosophy of the teachers may not be conducive to assuring access to the curriculum. In the positive I discovered there are researchers and university programs being updated and developed that are trying to shine a new light on how we look at education, how we study and view inclusion practices, the bias nature of the system and the way educators are trained. Again, I will be able to have some affect at my local level by bringing this topic to light at our inservice seminars for special education staff. I can advocate for a better understanding of local cultures and the common social behaviors exhibited in the classrooms of Bush schools; I can suggest workshops for regular education that focuses on teaching common core standards outside of textbooks and within relevant, cultural contexts; I can petition the school board to change policies and practices that are unfavorable and harmful in our local schools and request that options be explored for various diploma styles that better reflect the academic and life interests of our student population. What I can't do, nor can anyone else, is make poverty and culture disappear or make it irrelevant. But we can and must learn to include it and make sure that all students have the economic resources as others. Looking at children who do not have a diagnosable disability need to be viewed with a continuum of benchmarks instead of just a singular one. Remove student labels (with and without special education) and embrace true inclusion that allows for all students regardless of disability, race, religion, color, creed. I believe in local control and besides death, nothing in this life can be a guarantee. I can't promise that everyone will jump on board and take a more humane look at the educational system – all I do

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know is that it must be reconsidered. Not just repackaged, but really reinvented. We can't continue to leave large groups of kids in a chasm – life presents enough challenges without asking our youth to start out their adult lives with no hope - because the current system strips away one's identity if you cannot succeed in this culture of school; it lowers the confidence level of the self; it lowers the confidence level of one's peers in the self and it aims to remove the inherent dreams and struggles to better oneself. I am proud of who I am, from where I've come and I don't believe I've arrived at who I will wholly become but what I do know is that I don't need, in point of fact, I don't want everyone to look and behave just like me whether they choose to or not. I don't want to adopt Hindu holidays, the fashion statement of inner city Black youth or even middle Eastern music but I want all those things to continue to be a part of our landscape. To sum up, “the genesis of disproportionate representation is located beyond the borders of special education and requires a solid understanding of the intersection of culture, learning, disability, and the socio-historical constitution of educational processes and outcomes” (Klingner, 2005, pg 8). From this perspective or rather this multi-perspective, we really can achieve a system that doesn't leave a child behind!

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