

A culture of equality? Equitable access to education as viewed through academic scholarship

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Abstract

Race-based educational segregation has a long history in the United States and continues to exist even though prohibited by law. Recent manifestations of race-based educational discrimination are found in the overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs, their subjugation to high rates of exclusionary discipline, and their underrepresentation in gifted programs. This study used the ProQuest Education database and selected search terms to retrieve records of publications and examine trends in professional literature during four decades. Patterns were found in scholarship related to disproportionate representation of Black students in special education programs and the use of exclusionary suspension and expulsion with Black students as well as the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs. The most scholarship was found related to gifted programs, in which Blacks were underrepresented, and the amount of scholarship progressively decreased as the level of segregation of Black students increased from special education placement to suspension and expulsion. Further, the absolute amount of scholarship and the percentage of works published in scholarly journals were inversely related to the number of search terms with negative connotations used, including special education, minority, and poverty. Use of search terms with negative connotations was positively associated with the percentage of scholarship done by students in the form of dissertations and theses. Conclusions note scholarly findings of reduced adult outcomes caused by inequitable access to educational opportunities and encourage additional research into effective provision of culturally responsive teacher preparation and continuing education as alternatives to reliance on zero-tolerance and other policies that increase educational segregation of Black students.

Keywords: Disproportionate representation, special education, gifted, underrepresentation

Introduction

The history of race-based differential treatment of individuals in the United States is older than the history of the country itself. The institution of slavery began in what is now the United States in 1619 when twenty African slaves were delivered to Jamestown, Virginia on a Dutch ship (Coombs, 2011). Legal slavery in the U.S. continued until ratification of the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1865, which stated that “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (U.S.

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Const., amend. XIII, § 2). Subsequent years were marked by the passage of Black Codes until the 14th Amendment was ratified in 1868, providing equal protection under the law to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States” (U.S. Const., amend. XIV, § 1).

Equal protection under the law did not prevent the passage of Jim Crow Laws designed to enforce legal segregation, however, including race-based segregation of schools. Race-based school segregation had been previously upheld in Boston (*Roberts v. Boston*, 1850) and the concept of “separate but equal” was upheld by the United States Supreme Court in the 1896 case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 U.S. 537, 1896). This precedent remained the law of the land until overturned by the Supreme Court in 1954. In this case, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the court ruled that state laws establishing segregated schools were unconstitutional and that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal. Further, the court asserted that “Segregation of White and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The effect is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the negro group” (347 U.S. 483, 1954). This decision was criticized as being judicial overreach, however, when Senator Walter George read and approximately 100 U.S. Representatives and Senators signed a sophisticated legal argument unofficially named *The Southern Manifesto* in 1956 (Driver, 2014).

The trend toward educational inclusivity continued, however, and the desirability of educating all children in a common environment gained force in 1972. At that time, the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) filed suit on behalf of fourteen children whose intellectual disabilities resulted in their being denied admission to public schools. The District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania found that the Commonwealth was required to provide an appropriate public education to each child based upon the child’s disability. The Court further struck at educational segregation by stating that “Placement in a regular school is preferable to placement in a special school class is preferable to placement in any other type of program of education and training” (*PARC v. Pennsylvania*, 1972). As such, while segregation of students was not determined to be illegal, it was recognized that students should be educated in a common setting unless there is good reason for their separation. Because racial segregation was found unconstitutional under *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) required that children with disabilities be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), the legal importance of inclusive education had been firmly established by both case litigation and legislation.

Despite the clear legal preference for inclusive education, special education placements and disproportionately severe disciplinary practices continue to reduce educational opportunities for students of color. Confusing and seemingly contradictory court findings have confounded assessment practices used to identify students as having disabilities and place these students in segregated classrooms. For example, *Larry P. v. Riles* (1971) ruled that a process involving use of individual intelligence tests to place students in classes for the “educable mentally retarded” was biased against African American children and resulted in their loss of socio-economic and educational opportunities. A 1980 case, however, *Parents in Action on Special Education (PASE) v. Hannon*, decided that while some items on intelligence tests might be inappropriate for students from diverse cultural backgrounds, entire tests were not

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discriminatory against African American students and their use was appropriate as part of a larger assessment process. Both the disproportionate representation of students of color and the need for culturally responsive general education practices have long been recognized (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2005).

Likewise, disciplinary practices have resulted in African American students being removed from school far more than their White counterparts. Three years after ending a program of separate schools, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas ruled that the Dallas Independent School District was suspending African American elementary, middle, and high school students more frequently and for longer periods of time than their White counterparts (Hawkins v. Coleman, 1974). As a remedy, the court ordered the district to create a program to materially reduce “White institutional racism.” Since then, zero-tolerance policies requiring automatic suspension or expulsion for certain behaviors have gained favor despite having a disproportionate effect on Black children (Morris & Perry, 2016). As reported by Triplett, Allen, and Lewis (2014) “through the mechanism of zero tolerance, a nation of urban minority students have been and continue to be punished for the actions of predominantly White, suburban/rural gunmen” (p. 353). During the 2011 – 2012 school year the suspension rate for Black students in public elementary schools was over five times the rate of their White schoolmates, and the suspension rate for Black students in secondary schools more than three times the rate of their White peers (Children’s Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind, 2017).

Disproportionate segregation of Black students, whether achieved through placement in special education classes or by route of suspension or expulsion, results in negative outcomes. Regardless of race, a meta-analysis by Noltemeyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin (2015) covering studies from 1986 – 2012 uncovered a positive relationship between school suspensions and student drop-out rates as well as an inverse relationship between suspensions and academic achievement. The authors described their finding as particularly troubling because low-income, urban schools suspended students at a significantly higher rate than other schools. These findings have been confirmed by others, who have demonstrated that suspensions result in higher rates of dropping out even when preexisting differences between students are accounted for (Chu & Ready, 2018). Disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline is problematic because it has been broadly reported that Black students are more likely to drop out than White students (Chu & Ready, 2018; Dalton, Glennie, & Ingles, 2009; Kinloch, Burkhard, & Penn, 2017). Moreover, culturally and linguistically diverse students are two-thirds more likely to drop out than White students and in large cities over half of all culturally and linguistically diverse students drop out of school (IDEA (P. L. 105-17)(Section 601 (c)(8), 1997.

The impact of exclusionary disciplinary practices, especially when they result in students dropping out of school, are more severe than merely lower academic achievement. Failure to graduate from high school is associated with poorer adult outcomes in many facets of life (Bowers & Sprott, 2012). These include reduced lifetime earnings and fewer opportunities in the labor market, as well as economic costs to the rest of society (Suh, Malchow, & Suh, 2014). Further, students who drop out are likely to have poorer health outcomes and are more likely to experience incarceration as adults (Moretti, 2007; Muenning, 2007).

Likewise, lack of access to the best educational opportunities also reduces opportunities, and Black students are often excluded from classes for the most advanced students (Toldson, 2014).

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Minority students are less frequently recruited for gifted or other advanced academic programs (Ford, Coleman, & Davis, 2014), remain underrepresented in gifted programs (Ecker-Lyster, & Niileksela, 2017), and are more likely to drop out of programs for the gifted (Ford, 2010). Participation in gifted or other enriched academic programs, however, provides benefit including increasing academic achievement levels and desire to enter college (Miller & Gentry, 2010). Perhaps most importantly, participation in gifted programs may result in enhanced scholarly camaraderie (Burns, Henry, McCarthy, & Tripp, 2017), which could improve employment networking and help reduce racial social barriers as students reach adulthood.

Whether it occurs because of overrepresentation in special education programs, overuse of exclusionary disciplinary practices, or underrepresentation in gifted programs, the segregation of Black students results in their receiving reduced educational opportunities compared to their White peers and suffering lifelong consequences as a result. Critical Race Theory (CRT) asserts that racial background contributes significantly and persistently to inequitable opportunities in the United States (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and has been used as a framework to study a broad array of educational issues. Most relevant to this study, CRT has been applied to the study of racial backgrounds and school discipline (Anyon et al., 2016) and teacher preparation programs (Sleeter, 2017). Because of its impact on both teacher preparation and subsequent disciplinary practices, this study examines scholarship related to the segregation of educational opportunities for Black students through the lens of CRT. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to examine patterns of research related to educational segregation of Black students through special education placements, suspensions, expulsions, and exclusion from programs for the gifted.

Method

Procedure

To assess research activity related to the educational segregation of minority students, an exploratory investigation of published scholarship related to race-based segregation was conducted using the ProQuest Education database. This database was selected for examination because it contains over 900 journals and allows searches to examine customized time periods. The search started by examining publication activity during four decades as discrete time periods: the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. No restrictions were imposed related to full text, peer reviewed, source type, document type, or language, and all search terms were placed in quotation marks. To retrieve scholarship related to the use of special education as a means of segregating students, searches were conducted using only “disproportionate representation” and “special education.” The initial search was then followed by combining these terms with “minority” and “poverty,” both individually and together.

A similar approach was used to retrieve scholarship related to the use of suspensions and expulsions to segregate students. The terms “disproportionate suspension” or “disproportionate expulsion” were substituted for “disproportionate representation” and each was then combined with “special education,” “poverty,” “minority,” or both “poverty” and “minority.”

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Another search was undertaken to retrieve scholarship related to the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs. This search began with use the terms “under represented,” and “gifted.” This was followed by adding the search terms “minority” and “poverty” both individually and in combination. The ProQuest Education database was also used for these searches, and they were also performed for the same decade-long time periods. Because of the large number of responses retrieved by searches of publications during each of the final three decades under study, only responses from the year of each decade that produced the most results were examined.

Finally, searches were conducted for each of the combinations of search terms described above to determine the likely authorship of published works. To analyze trends in scholarship conducted as dissertations or theses, presumably by students under the guidance off faculty mentors, the number of dissertations or theses retrieved was divided by entire number of responses retrieved since 1980 for each combination of search terms.

To ensure the appropriateness of the ProQuest Education database for this study, similar procedures were used to search EBSCOhost databases. First, a search was conducted of “Academic Search Complete,” described on the EBSCOhost website as “the world's most valuable and comprehensive scholarly, multi-disciplinary full-text database, with more than 8,500 full-text periodicals, including more than 7,300 peer-reviewed journals”. This resulted in retrieval of a smaller number of responses than expected for each combination of search terms. Next, all databases on the EBSCOhost website were searched with each set of search terms, and this resulted in a much larger number of responses. Table 1 displays the number of responses retrieved from EBSCOhost searches based on the database(s) used. Because of the large variation in the number of responses retrieved using different EBSCOhost databases, the ProQuest Education database was considered more appropriate for purposes of this study. All data in this study other than that shown in Table 1 were drawn from searches of the ProQuest Education database.

Public Law 94-142, signed into law in 1975, required that all children aged 3 to 21 be provided access to a Free Appropriate Public Education by September 1, 1980, regardless of the nature or severity of their disability (EHA, 1975). Because this was the first federal legislation requiring the education of all students with disabilities, the search for scholarly activity began with works published in 1980. Scholarly activity retrieved on the ProQuest Education database using these search terms was limited during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. Because of this, the title of each article and the journal in which it was published were scanned to look for patterns. The number of responses retrieved increased significantly in the latter two decades, necessitating a more selective method of seeking trends in scholarship. To accomplish this, a search of the ProQuest Education database using the same terms was conducted for each year from 2000 to 2018 to determine patterns of scholarly activities. Article titles and publishing journals were then scanned for the most and least active years in terms of results retrieved during each of these two decades.

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Table 1.

Comparison of EBSCOhost databases

	Academic Search Complete				All EBSCOhost Databases			
	Disp Rep SPED	Disp Rep SPED Minority	Disp Rep SPED Poverty	Disp Rep SPED Minority Poverty	Disp Rep SPED	Disp Rep SPED Minority	Disp Rep SPED Poverty	Disp Rep SPED Minority Poverty
Years								
1980s	7	5	0	0	15	7	0	0
1990s	89	55	3	3	159	114	38	31
2000s	332	150	22	15	984	693	366	319
2010s	421	151	29	10	1184	786	438	386

	Disp Sus SPED	Disp Sus Minority	Disp Sus Poverty	Disp Sus Minority Poverty	Disp Sus SPED	Disp Sus Minority	Disp Sus Poverty	Disp Sus Minority Poverty
Years								
1980s	3	2	0	0	4	3	0	0
1990s	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
2000s	1	0	0	0	9	29	9	25
2010s	3	1	1	0	58	59	48	37

	Disp Exp SPED	Disp Exp Minority	Disp Exp Poverty	Disp Exp Minority Poverty	Disp Exp SPED	Disp Exp Minority	Disp Exp Poverty	Disp Exp Minority Poverty
Years								
1980s	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1990s	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2000s	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2010s	1	1	0	0	1	2	1	0

	Underrep Gifted	Underrep Gifted Minority	Underrep Gifted Poverty	Underrep Gifted Minority Poverty	Underrep Gifted	Underrep Gifted Minority	Underrep Gifted Poverty	Underrep Gifted Minority Poverty
Years								
1980s	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
1990s	3	2	0	0	6	3	1	1
2000s	5	2	0	0	29	18	0	0
2010s	9	1	0	0	24	3	0	0

Note. Disp Rep = Disproportionate Representation; SPED = Special Education; Dis Susp = Disproportionate Suspension; Disp Exp = Disproportionate Expulsion; Underrep = Underrepresented.

Results

Trends in scholarship related to racially disproportionate special education and gifted placements, suspensions, and expulsions of Black students were examined via searches of the ProQuest Education database. These searches started by examining publication activity during

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four decades as discrete time periods: the 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. No restrictions related to full text, peer reviewed, source type, document type, or language were imposed, and the search terms were placed in quotation marks. To retrieve scholarship related to the use of special education as a means of segregating students, searches were conducted using only “disproportionate representation” and “special education.” The initial search was then followed by combining these terms with “minority” and “poverty,” both individually and together. Table 2 displays the number of responses retrieved by searching the ProQuest Education database.

Table 2.
Responses for Disproportionate Representation

Years	ProQuest Education			
	Disp Rep SPED	Disp Rep SPED Minority	Disp Rep SPED Poverty	Disp Rep SPED Minority Poverty
1980s	2	1	0	0
1990s	45	36	18	14
2000s	441	380	252	235
2010s	730	619	484	450
% disser	48.4	52.3	61.1	63

Note. Disp Rep = Disproportionate Representation; SPED = Special Education; % dissert = Percentage of responses that are dissertations.

As shown in Table 2, the search of the ProQuest Education database for the decade of the 1980s using the terms “disproportionate representation,” and “special education” retrieved two unduplicated documents. The first, published in 1987, was a review of a book focused on the overrepresentation of students with disabilities in correctional facilities. The second document was published in *Learning Disabilities Quarterly* in 1988 and was an article examining disproportionate representation of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students in classes for students with learning disabilities. Neither document published in the 1980s related to the issue of overrepresentation of Blacks in Special Education. When the search term “minority” was added to the search, it again retrieved the response related to LEP students in classes for students with Learning Disabilities. No results were retrieved when “poverty” was added to the search.

Scholarly activity related to disproportionate representation and special education increased to 45 responses during the 1990s, though the first article retrieved on the topic was not published until 1995. This paper, “Disproportionate representation of African Americans in emotionally handicapped classes,” was published in the *Journal of Black Studies* (Serwatka, Deering, & Grant, 1995). Interest in the topic increased as the decade progressed, with seven articles being published, each in a different journal, in 1997. Twenty articles were published in 1998, and 17 articles were published in 1999. Moreover, *The Journal of Special Education*

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published a special issue (volume 21, issue 1) containing nine articles related to disproportionate representation in special education in 1998. Most scholarship addressing this topic in the 1990s was concentrated in a few journals, with The Journal of Special Education publishing ten, Remedial and Special Education publishing eight, and Behavioral Disorders and Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools each publishing three. Narrowing the search to include “minority” as a term resulted in removal of two of the three responses published in Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools; the replacement of “minority” with “poverty” resulted in 50% fewer responses, but all three responses from Language, Speech & Hearing Services in Schools were retrieved. In addition to returning fewer responses, a trend in authorship was observed when both “minority” and “poverty” were added to “disproportionate representation” and “special education” as search terms, with the percentage of dissertations published increasing with the number of search terms used.

Searches for “disproportionate representation” and “special education” retrieved many more responses during the decade spanning 2000 to 2010 than prior to that time. As such, responses for the two outlier years, 2000 with 9 responses and 2008 with 117 responses, were examined and showed widely divergent patterns. In 2000, the journal Behavioral Disorders published two articles and the remaining seven articles were published by seven different journals. Publications in 2008, on the other hand, were concentrated in relatively few venues. Seventy (60%) of the works retrieved were dissertations or theses, eight were published in the Journal of Special Education, seven in Exceptional Children, and four in Behavioral Disorders. Adding “minority” as a search term resulted in 111 responses, only six fewer than before it was added. Adding “poverty” retrieved 76 responses, and searching for “special education,” “disproportionate representation,” “minority,” and “poverty” retrieved 75 responses. Most responses retrieved were for dissertations or theses rather than publications in scholarly journals. When “minority” was added as a search term, 61% of responses retrieved were for dissertations or theses, and when either “poverty” or “poverty” and “minority” was added the percentage of responses for dissertations and theses increased to 72%.

Of 734 responses retrieved from the ProQuest Education database for “disproportionate representation” and “special education” in the interval from 2010 – 2018, 2018 delivered the fewest with 12, while 2016 delivered the most, 141. Of these, 110 were dissertations or theses, four were published in Behavioral Disorders, three were published in Contemporary School Psychology, and two were published in School Psychology Review. Addition of the search term “minority” resulted in retrieval of 130 results, addition of the term “poverty” retrieved 109 responses, and a search using all four terms (disproportionate representation, special education, minority, and poverty) retrieved 106 responses. For the same interval, 2018 delivered the fewest responses, a total of twelve. Eleven of the responses provided abstracts, and each of the abstracts was read. None of the abstracts provided content related to the disproportionate placement of Black students in special education. Based on its title, the twelfth manuscript, Teachers urge Berkeley Unified School District to raise employees’ wages, was also considered irrelevant to the topic of this study. Because none of the responses searching for “disproportionate representation” and “special education” retrieved relevant documents in 2018, it was unnecessary to narrow the searches further by adding the terms “minority” or “poverty.”

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When the term “disproportionate suspension” replaced “disproportionate representation” in the search of the ProQuest Education database, no results were found during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s. During the decade from 2000 to 2009 no more than 11 responses were retrieved for any search including “Disproportionate suspension;” the number of results retrieved for each combination of terms is reported in Table 3. Significant overlap was found in each of the searches, with six responses showing up in each of the searches. Review of the titles of the works indicated that two did not relate to the content of this study. The other four publications related to preventive approaches to suspension (positive behavior support), demographics of suspension, the school-to-prison pipeline, and school dropout and graduation rates. Two of the four publications were dissertations. Table 3 displays the number of results retrieved by each combination of search terms.

Table 3.
Responses for Disproportionate Suspension

Years	ProQuest Education			
	Disp Sus SPED	Disp Sus Minority	Disp Sus Poverty	Disp Sus Minority Poverty
1980s	0	0	0	0
1990s	0	0	0	0
2000s	10	11	10	8
2010s	40	50	41	37
% dissert	66	60.7	68.6	75.6

Note. Disp Rep = Disproportionate Suspension; SPED = Special Education; % dissert = Percentage of responses that are dissertations.

Because the number of responses retrieved for the interval from 2010 to 2018 increased to 50 for the most active combination of search terms, another search was conducted to identify works that included all four search terms (disproportionate suspension, special education, minority, and poverty). This search retrieved 32 responses, so the titles of each work were examined. Twenty-seven of these responses were dissertations or theses, four came from scholarly journals, and one was a communication from the National Association of School Psychologists. Common themes of works published during this time included practices related to school suspension, including the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of those who make disciplinary referrals and the impact of discipline on academic achievement.

Like the results related to suspension, no results were retrieved during the decade of the 1980s when “disproportionate expulsion” was used as a search term. During the decade of the 1990s, one result was retrieved, which contained all three search terms (disproportionate expulsion, minority, and poverty). This manuscript, “Barriers to the implementation of multicultural education in a secondary teacher preparation program,” (Huerta, 1999), recommended a broad array of approaches to preparing teachers for diverse students, including examining the practices of Colleges of Education and increasing the recruitment and retention of minority preservice teachers (Huerta, 1999). Searches of the ProQuest Education database didn’t

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retrieve additional results during the decade of the 2000s. During the interval from 2010 to 2018, four responses were retrieved for “disproportionate expulsion” and “special education,” five were retrieved for “disproportionate expulsion” and “minority,” and three were retrieved that contained all the search terms (“disproportionate expulsion,” “minority,” and “poverty”). All but one response followed themes of underrepresentation in programs for the gifted or educators’ beliefs, attitudes and practices regarding race and gender and came from dissertations or theses. One scholarly article related to disproportionate discipline or special education placement of blacks was retrieved during this time period, and it also mentioned segregation via underrepresentation of black students in honors classes (Toldson, 2014). Table 4 displays the results retrieved from searches related to expulsion.

Table 4.

Responses for Disproportionate Expulsion

Years	ProQuest Education			
	Disp Exp SPED	Disp Exp Minority	Disp Exp Poverty	Disp Exp Minority Poverty
1980s	0	0	0	0
1990s	0	1	1	1
2000s	0	0	0	0
2010s	4	5	3	3
% dissert	75	66.7	75	75

Note. Disp Rep = Disproportionate Expulsion; SPED = Special Education; % dissert = Percentage of responses that are dissertations.

Finally, searches to examine scholarly activity related to underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs were undertaken. The number of responses retrieved from each of these searches is displayed in Table 5.

Table 5.

Responses for Underrepresented Gifted

Years	ProQuest Education			
	Underrep Gifted	Underrep Gifted Minority	Underrep Gifted Poverty	Underrep Gifted Minority Poverty
1980s	4	0	0	0
1990s	134	102	36	36
2000s	972	790	467	432
2010s	2614	2120	1581	1428
% dissert	61.7	67.9	76.6	79.1

Note. Underrep Gifted = Underrepresented Gifted; % dissert = Percentage of responses that are dissertations.

A search using the terms “underrepresented” and “gifted” retrieved four responses during the 1980s; their titles did not indicate discussion of underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs. No results were retrieved when the terms “minority” or “poverty” were included, either individually or in combination.

The number of results retrieved increased for the search of scholarship in the 1990s. During this decade, no works were retrieved during 1993; 1999 was the most active year for search terms “underrepresented” and “gifted” with 38 responses. Thirty-two of these responses were in scholarly journals. When the search was narrowed by adding the term “minority” the number of responses was reduced to 30, 25 of which were published in scholarly journals. Fourteen records were returned when “poverty” replaced “minority” as a search term, twelve of which were in scholarly journals, and the same results were retrieved when both “poverty” and “minority” were included as search terms.

2008 retrieved 308 results, the most for “underrepresented” and “gifted” during any year of the decade from 2000 to 2009. Of these responses, 218 were for dissertations or theses, 77 were for scholarly journals, seven were for trade journals, and six were for magazines. When the term “minority” was added, the number of responses decreased to 260, with 196 coming from dissertations and theses and 57 coming from scholarly journals. Substituting “poverty” for minority resulted in another decrease in the number of responses, with 150 dissertations and theses and 24 scholarly journals out of a total of 176 responses. When both “minority” and “poverty” were included in the search of 2008, 166 responses were retrieved. Dissertations and theses outnumbered publications in scholarly journals 142 to 22 in 2008.

Finally, 2016 was the most productive year during the period from 2010 to 2018, returning 640 results for “underrepresented” and “gifted.” Five hundred forty-five of these responses were for dissertations or theses, and seventy-five were for scholarly journals. The number of responses decreased to 543 when the term “minority” was added to the search, 480 of which were dissertations or theses and 50 of which were works in scholarly journals. Replacing

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minority with “poverty” resulted in a further decrease to 424 responses, 384 of which were for dissertations or theses and 30 of which were for scholarly journals. Finally, when both “poverty” and “minority” were included as search terms, 388 results were retrieved, 358 of which were dissertations or theses and 22 of which came from scholarly journals.

Discussion

The United States has a long history of treating individuals differently based on their race, and this racially differential treatment is reflected in public schools. The first manifestation of educational segregation was legal prohibitions against literacy instruction for slaves (Davis, 1981; Pawley, 2010). After the abolition of slavery, Blacks were segregated into schools that were ‘separate but equal’ but the United States Supreme Court ruled that separate schools couldn’t be equal and that separate schools resulted in greater harm to blacks than whites (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954). Still, school segregation has continued under forms such as disproportionately high placements rates of Black students in classes for students with disabilities (Maydosz, 2014; Skiba et al., 2008; Sullivan & Bal, 2013), higher rates of suspension and expulsion for Black students (Stetson & Collins, 2010; Sullivan, Klingbell, & Van Norman, 2013), and providing fewer Black students with access to high-quality educational services such as gifted programs (Ford, 2014; Lewis, Novak, & Weber, 2018). Passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1972 reaffirmed the federal government’s intention, originally outlined in Brown v. Board of Education (1954), that educational settings should be as inclusive as possible, and a few years later educational scholars began writing about racial inequities in the provision of educational services. The purpose of this study was to examine patterns of scholarly publications related to the overrepresentation of Blacks in special education programs, the higher rates of exclusionary discipline applied to Black students, and their underrepresentation in educational programs for the gifted.

A broad view of the results can be cautiously interpreted as reflecting society’s values regarding the topics being searched. Examining solely the relative quantities of responses retrieved for each topic, it is possible to conclude that education of the gifted is valued more highly than education of students with disabilities. Applying the same method and logic to the entirety of the topics covered in this study could lead one to conclude that there is relatively little interest in the disproportionate suspension of students with disabilities and almost no interest in poor or minority students who are permanently deprived of education via expulsion.

Published scholarship on these topics was reviewed by conducting a series of searches of the ProQuest Education database. This review uncovered trends in published scholarship, including continuously increasing research activity related to disproportionately high placement of Black students in special education programs, continuously increasing but significantly less research activity related to higher rates of out-of-school suspensions of Black students, and a consistent lack or near absence of scholarship related to the high rates of expulsion of Black students from school. The amount of scholarship related to the underrepresentation of Black students in programs for the gifted showed the greatest change over time, with only four works published on the topic during the 1980s but more than 2,600 published between 2010 and 2018.

Additional trends were found within each of these broader topics. For example, the first article published on the overrepresentation of Black students in special education programs was

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published in *The Journal of Black Studies* in 1995, and related articles in the late 1990s were limited to publication in relatively few journals. As time passed, however, the amount of scholarship that was published and the variety of venues in which it was published both increased. Further, as the terms “minority” and “poverty” were added to the search, the percentage of published scholarly works in the form of dissertations or theses increased, possibly indicating more interest in the topic by relatively new scholars than their more established peers. The trend of substantial proportions of scholarship appearing in the form of dissertations or theses continued across all combinations of search terms.

More results were retrieved from searches when “minority” was used as a qualifier than when “poverty” was used. This continued even after scholars began to assert that disproportionate special education placements and discipline were more closely related to economic than racial factors. Further, a high percentage of the searches that used “poverty” as a qualifier also included the search term “minority.” Though it is doubtful and hopefully incorrect, this result could lead to possible conjecture that scholars assumed economically disadvantaged students must also be minorities. At the most extreme end of this trend, every response retrieved for disproportionate suspension or expulsion that included the search term “poverty” also included the term “minority,” though more responses were retrieved when searching for works about minorities without regard for economic status. In fact, in the current decade, searches for “disproportionate expulsion” and “minority” retrieved twice as many responses as searches for “disproportionate expulsion” and “poverty.”

Finally, as mentioned above, it should be noted that the percentage of articles published in scholarly journals was inversely related to the number of search terms used in every category examined. In other words, as the terms “minority,” and “poverty,” were added to a search, the percentage of scholarship published as dissertations or theses, written by students, increased and the percentage published in scholarly journals decreased. The percentage of works published in scholarly journals was lowest when both “poverty” and “minority” were used as qualifiers.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study relates to difficulty in selecting search terms that appropriately identify relevant literature. Numerous permutations of any of the major search terms could have been selected. For example, exceptional student education or disability could have been used instead of special education and African American, Black, or ethnic could have been used instead of minority. Even choosing between use of “under represented” and “underrepresented” resulted in retrieval of different responses. As a practical matter, however, it would be impossible to conduct searches for all possible permutations and combinations of search terms, and if it were possible it would result in retrieval of many duplicate documents. As a result, search terms were selected and used consistently. The reader should be cautioned, however, that use of different search terms might result in different patterns of responses.

Conclusion

Continued research on the educational segregation of Black students is important because racial segregation has long-lasting consequences regardless of how it is achieved. In-school segregation has negative consequences: students in special education programs have lower rates of graduation, labor market participation, and employment than their general education peers (Schifter, 2016). Exclusionary discipline also has negative consequences; multiple suspensions are related to lower school achievement, especially when experienced by already vulnerable populations (Hwang, 2018) and school suspension may reduce students' motivation, commitment to following school rules, and feeling of connectedness to a school (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Suspension is associated with increased risk of dropping out of school (Lee, Gregory, & Fan, 2011), and dropping out of school is associated with negative outcomes including lower adult earnings (Suh, Malchow, & Suh, 2014) and poor health (Moretti, 2007; Muenning, 2007). Likewise, segregation from high achieving peers in gifted programs results in lost opportunities to socialize around academic content (Burns, Henry, McCarthy, & Tripp, 2017) and reduced desire to enter college (Miller & Gentry, 2010).

The United States Constitution states that all men are created equal, yet racial inequality has been part of our national fabric longer than the Constitution. Open racism seems to be making a resurgence and it is easier than ever for people to say that slavery is over, that passage of the Voting Rights Act ended the Jim Crow era ended more than 50 years ago, that school segregation became illegal over 60 years ago, and that everyone in our country has equal rights. Review of the research regarding race-based educational segregation, however, demonstrates that the playing field is not level. Research is needed to determine how past research has been translated into practice and how it has impacted equitable access to the broad range of educational experiences. Even more importantly, in-depth research is needed on how to incorporate culturally responsive instructional and disciplinary approaches into teacher preparation programs as well as continuing education requirements for practicing teachers. Then, perhaps, all children will be educated in a culture of equality.

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