



Edward Fergus

The Integration Project Among White Teachers and Racial/Ethnic Minority Youth: Understanding Bias in School Practice

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled schools in the United States needed to desegregate and begin integration. The decision was a radical departure from the facilities argument initially presented; it added the issue that the segregation of Black students was having a deleterious effect on their self-concept. Many scholars argue the integration has not been sustained (Orfield and Frankenberg, 2014); in fact, a recent report highlights Black, Latino and Native American students are less integrated with White and Asian students than in 1954 (Orfield and Frankenberg, 2014). However the Brown decision set forth another integration project – the integration of White practitioners (i.e., teachers and principals) with Black, Latino and Native American student

populations! This article brings together an array of social interaction research that articulates the complexity of this integration project. More specifically, the article focuses on demographic patterns of intimate interactions (i.e., friendship networks, interracial marriage), research studies that document race-based ideas of learning and achievement; the presence of “passive” lowered expectations occurring through interactions such as stereotype threat (Steele and Aronson, 1995) and racial/ethnic micro-aggressions (Wing Sue, 2010) and “active” lowered expectations through school structures such as curriculum (Anyon, 1983) and resource allocation (Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. NYS, 2003).

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In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that schools in the United States needed to desegregate and begin integration. The decision was a radical departure from the facilities argument initially presented; it added the issue that the segregation of Black students was having a deleterious effect on their self-concept. Many scholars have argued the integration has not been sustained (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014); in fact, a recent report highlights Black, Latino, and Native American

students are less integrated with White and Asian students than in 1954 (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014). However the *Brown* decision set forth another integration project—the integration of White practitioners (i.e., teachers and principals) with Black, Latino, and Native American student populations!

Over the last 60 years, the proportion of White women teaching Black, Latino, and Native American students has increased; from 2004 to 2011 the rate of White teachers has stayed consistent from 83.1% to 81.9% respectively, and from 69% to 84% female between 1986 to 2011 (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). Additionally, in 2011 among the teaching population, 36% had 10 to 20 years experience and 21% with more than 20 years experience. Among principals in K–12 settings, as recent as 2011–2012, 80% were non-Hispanic White, 10% Black or African American, 7% Hispanic/Latino, and 3% other; and 52% were women and 48% men (Bitterman, Goldring & Gray, 2013). Meanwhile, the public school enrollment is decidedly Black and Latino; as of 2011, these two populations comprise 40% of enrollment (NCES, 2004–2011).

What researchers also know is that, historically and currently, all racial and ethnic groups have limited contact with each other. A survey report on social networks by the Public Religion Research Institute (2014) of over 4,000 individuals documents that among White Americans 91% of their social network are also White, 83% among Black Americans, and 64% among Hispanic Americans. The research that explores these patterns provides clear indication of the importance in cross-racial interaction experiences. For example, in a quantitative study of diverse neighborhoods, workplace, and congregations, Whites developed greater affinity toward interracial marriage in such diverse environments (Perry, 2013). The combination of these trends in population growth and social interactions suggest that Black and Latino students are likely attending schools with a predominantly White and female population that has a limited lived experience of societal integration.

A reoccurring concern among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers is the effect of this limited social interaction on decision-making in educational programs like special education and gifted

programs, and disciplinary outcomes. The research on disproportionality in special education, suspension, and gifted not only situates the propensity of racial and ethnic minority student populations experiencing under- and overrepresentation in these areas (Brown et al., 2005; Cavendish, Artiles, & Harry, 2014; Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson 2002; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2014), but also there is a recognition of processes including practitioner decision-making capacities and biases as primers for identification of racial and ethnic minority students in these educational programs.

Given this pattern of practitioner-to-student racial integration quotient and a persistent pattern of disproportionate representation in special education, suspension and gifted programs, there continues to be a need for practice-based work that explores how one knows whether teachers and principals, in general, know how to get along with or have developed the cross-cultural competencies to work with racial and ethnic minority student populations that were previously legally and socially segregated? And more importantly, are these social interaction gaps a precursor or trigger for disproportionality in special education, suspension, and gifted program enrollment?

This article brings together an array of social interaction research that articulates the complexity of this integration project and the manner in which practitioners can explore these phenomenon. More specifically, the article focuses on research studies that document race-based ideas of practitioner beliefs and expectations that can create and/or justify school climates that allow passive lowered expectations occurring through interactions such as stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) and racial/ethnic microaggressions (Sue, 2010) and active lowered expectations through school structures such as curriculum (Anyon, 1981) and resource allocation (Campaign for Fiscal Equity v. NYS, 2003). This article intends to provide practitioners an understanding of the research on the bias-based beliefs and expectations necessary to reduce to promote an *integration project* that builds the hearts and minds necessary to reduce disproportionality in special education, suspension/

behavioral referrals and gifted programs (Fergus, 2016a, 2016b).

Research on Impact of Bias

Research on practitioner beliefs and expectations highlights significant patterns of how beliefs intersect with academic performance. Ford, Trotman Scott, Moore, and Amos (2013) identified the manner in which teacher beliefs about cognitive ability functions in identification of Black students in gifted programs. Similarly, other research suggests that group-level expectations may have more impact than individual-level expectations, because the group norm perception operates as a gauge for understanding individual student interactions (Agirdag, Van Houtte, & Van Avermaet, 2013; Rubie-Davies, Flint, & McDonald, 2012; Van Houtte, 2011). In another study of African Canadian boys, the perceptions of these youth as fatherless, immigrants, and Black structured the manner in which educational opportunities and social interactions were made available for population by practitioners (James, 2012). Racial-mismatch appears to also correlate with beliefs and expectations. In a fixed-effect study of teacher expectations, beliefs, and racial-mismatch, Gershenson, Holt, and Papageorge (2016) identified expectations and beliefs of non-Black teachers toward Black students 30–40% lower than Black teachers have toward same population. Interestingly, the beliefs and expectations of non-Black teachers toward Black men were markedly lowered compared to Black female students. Bias-based beliefs and expectations were also found to be minimized when academic information focuses on disconfirming stereotypes (Glock and Krolak-Schwerdt, 2013). Other studies demonstrate similar patterns among mathematic teachers (Clark & Zygmunt, 2014), history teachers and curriculum (Levy, 2016), and teacher expectations is reduced in diverse school composition (Thys & Van Houtte, 2016). Beliefs alone do not result in disparate outcomes, active behaviors that are discriminatory help to mediate its effect on racial/ethnic minority student experiences of being overly referred to special education and/or discipline. Eccles, Wong, and Peck (2006), in a study of 11th-grade Black students identified daily encounters of racial discrimination effect

academic motivation and engagement. Thus, there is a growing empirical account of practitioners' beliefs and expectations of students intersecting with their own notions of race.

The Bias to Address: Race and Culture Notions in Educational Practice

As demonstrated in previous sections, substantive research highlights the relevance of bias-based beliefs and expectations, both implicit and explicit as operating in school settings. There are three types of bias-based beliefs that are relevant for practitioners to understand: (a) color-blindness, (b) deficit-thinking, and (c) poverty disciplining (Fergus, 2016a). We know from prior research that teacher ideologies and beliefs about the student population they serve can have a positive or negative effect on the student outcomes via the actions and behaviors teachers choose to employ in the classroom (e.g., Madon, Jussim, & Eccles, 1997; Madon et al., 1998; Madon et al., 2001; Proctor, 1984). And in current research, bias-based beliefs in disproportionate school districts demonstrate colorblindness, racial discomfort, and deficit thinking as interacting with practitioner self-efficacy (Fergus, 2016a). In other words, these bias-based beliefs are readily present when there is a lessened degree of teaching self-efficacy.

These beliefs operate within the context of school policies and practices are not mutually exclusive, they more often than not operate simultaneously. In fact, McKenzie and Scheurich, (2004) discussed these beliefs as not only operating within schools, but also argued that school leaders find themselves falling into a trap in which they struggle knowing how to address these beliefs.

Colorblindness

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2006) described colorblindness as the new form of racial ideology that emerged after the civil rights era. Bonilla-Silva highlighted the following as features of a colorblindness ideology: The best form of removing racism (a) omits race, gender, and other social identities as a descriptor; (b) involves treating individuals as

individuals and not considering their social identities; and (c) focuses on discussing and framing the commonalities between individuals. Though viewing individuals' commonality is a desired state of humanity, colorblindness has also led to a pattern of rationalizing racial inequality as due to "market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and Blacks' imputed cultural limitations" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 92). This ideology is used to make assertion such as "Latinos' high poverty rate [due] to a relaxed work ethic, or residential segregation as due to natural tendencies among groups" (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 92). A colorblindness belief views the presence of residential segregation in urban and suburban communities as due to individual's home affordability and are blind to the subtle practices and processes of realtors limiting home or apartment views (Ondrich, 2003), or bank practices of subjectively rendering higher interests rates (Fishbein & Bunce, 2001) to low-income and racial/ethnic and linguistic minority groups. Colorblindness belief appears in explanations for differential outcomes in employment practices, even though numerous studies document patterns such as differential response to individuals based on race association to a name (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004), or Black applicants with no criminal record are offered low-wage jobs at lower rates than White applicants with a criminal record (Pager, Western, & Bonilowski, 2009).

A current example of colorblindness is in the manner in which various charter schools and charter advocacy groups frame the need for school choice. Specifically charter schools are framed as emerging due to educational policies limiting pedagogical innovation. However, this movement omits to acknowledge that the absence of innovation is due to a historical devaluation in the education of marginalized populations. This omission among charter advocacy groups demonstrates a colorblind frame. Thus, a colorblindness belief prevents an individual from understanding how the historical, political, economic, and social translations of marginalized social identities into everyday practices is limiting access and opportunity, and creating different forms of response to limiting conditions (e.g., despair, anger, frustration, fear, etc.). It is these frames, as Bonilla-Silva (2003) described, that operate as cul-de-sacs to

interpret and rationalize the world, however these frames misinterpret the world and make blind dominance and power in not having to ever experience or imagine marginalization.

Over time, colorblindness becomes treated and discussed as a more culturally-evolved concept. It can be found among school practitioners who continuously advocate "why can't we stop looking at each other based on color?" or "my students need to see their similarities and not focus on differences." Thus, many teachers and administrators strive to build a colorblindness perspective among their students because they have a well-intentioned belief that, for example, if Black students are able to successfully absorb a colorblindness perspective, it will be a cultural advancement for these students or if Spanish speaking Latinos successfully adopt English language skills and remove Spanish language it will be a cultural advancement for them.

Deficit-Thinking Belief

Richard Valencia (2010) defined deficit thinking as an ideology used within the field of education and in schools to explain academic performance as a result of deficiencies within an individual and group. A deficit ideology discounts the presence of systemic inequalities as the result of race-based processes, practices, and policies. Most importantly, a deficit ideology places fault in a group for the conditions they find themselves experiencing; as Valencia (2010) stated, deficit thinking is, "a type of cognition that is a relatively simple and efficient form of attributing the 'cause' of human behavior" (p. 34). According to Valencia, what supports this deficit thinking are three paradigms of thought: (a) a genetic pathology model, (b) a culture of poverty model, and (c) a marginalization of low-income and students of color model. The first two models are of particular interest for describing the genesis and operation of deficit thinking.

A genetic pathology model, popularized during the early 20th century, argued the scientific marking of hereditary or genetic traits (e.g., cranial size) associated with superior genetic traits and discourage—even eliminate—those that were linked with inferiority. The science of genetic pathology spurred the development of laws prohibiting interracial

marriage in states such as California, Oklahoma, Maryland, and Louisiana until these mandates became unconstitutional in 1967, *Loving v. Virginia* (87 S. Ct. 1817; 18 L. Ed. 2d 1010; 1967), as well as influenced the development of national legislative actions, such as the Immigration Act of 1924, which stipulated the restriction of individuals from specific countries (i.e., southern and eastern Europe). Though there is sufficient evidence to refute such genetic arguments, social remnants continue to surface that support the idea of genetic differences between racial groups, for example, cultural projects such as the PBS series, “Finding Your Roots” and “African American Lives,” which use forms of genetic testing to fuel the notion that race is biological and less about social construction.

Culture of poverty model, also known as cultural deficiency, refers to an explanation of poverty that argues the cultural attributes or practices often associated with historically disenfranchised racial/ethnic groups (specifically, Blacks and Latinos) have prevented them from assimilating and attaining social mobility within US society. Examples of cultural deficiencies include limited attitudes and outlooks of the future, failure to internalize work value ethics, instant gratification behavior, lack of parent involvement in schools, low intellectual abilities, emphasis on masculinity and honor, and an aversion to honest work (See deficit thinking samples). Other so-called deficiencies may include early initiation to sex among children, female-headed households, fatalistic attitude toward life, and limited interest in education (Eitzen & Baca-Zinn, 1994). This notion seeks to establish a causal linkage between cultural attributes and socio-economic mobility.

The combination of these two concepts—genetic pathology and culture of poverty—provide the foundation for deficit thinking bias. In other words, thinking of racial/ethnic minority groups as genetically inferior and culturally deficient supports deficit ideas of groups and assist in rationalizing why some children are gifted and others are problem behaviors.

Poverty-Disciplining Belief

This belief, similar to deficit thinking, points to low-income people at fault for persistent conditions,

however poverty-disciplining belief considers changing the behavioral and psychological dispositions of these individuals as paramount to fixing their low-income condition. In other words, deficit thinking bias is focused on a set of beliefs about ability; poverty disciplining bias is focused on changing behavior and thinking of low-income individuals. Joe Soss, Richard Fording, and Sandford Schram (2011) framed, in *Disciplining the Poor*, the fact that over the last 20 or so years, social welfare policy has involved promoting the notion that low-income individuals “civic incorporation can be achieved only by forcing the poor to confront a more demanding and appropriate ‘operational definition of citizenship’” (p. 5). In other words, people in society think and treat individuals living in low-income and extreme poverty conditions as requiring a level of disciplining in which they learn ways of being *good citizens*, for them to help themselves.

The practice that ensues from such a biased idea of individuals living in low-income conditions focuses on disciplining individuals into behaviors perceived as necessary/required for social mobility. For example, within the innovation of mixed-income housing (a housing strategy to integrate different income levels of families and individuals) various forms of disciplining the poor exist and is framed as *universal good resident* behaviors. For instance, since 2000, the Chicago Housing Authority has placed in mixed-income housing distinct restrictions on low-income renters and not for homeowners, such as that renters cannot have grills on their patios but homeowners could; renters cannot have visitors come and go freely; the building manager conducts upkeep visits of renters units; and renters are required to attend classes on how to be a good neighbor. Another example of policy with a disciplining-the-poor bias involves the move by various state governments to limit the types of goods and services individuals living in low-income and extreme poverty are allowed to purchase with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) dollars: In May, 2015 the Kansas state legislature passed restrictions on the amount of money TANF recipients can withdraw from an ATM to \$25 per day, which means they receive less money, because each ATM withdrawal includes a user fee for those machines; additionally, TANF individuals are not permitted to redeem

benefits at swimming pools, movie theaters, and tattoo parlors.

The last example of disciplining-the-poor bias can be found in the recent proliferation of *no excuses* approaches to discipline in schools. The *no excuses* approach—most often associated with charter schools, but also prevalent in public schools—involves practices to change low-income and racial/ethnic minority student behaviors. For example, in a charter network, students begin the school year on the floor and have to demonstrate appropriate behaviors to earn their desks, teachers, and other school activities; in several charter and public schools, students receive detention for dying their hair colors perceived as unnatural (e.g., pink, green, orange), wearing dangling earrings, and talking in the hallway between classes; in a large urban school district, the predominantly Black and Latino elementary schools require students to walk in the hallway pretending to have bubbles in their mouth and hugging themselves, called the *hugs and bubbles* approach, to have them walk in the hallway.

Conclusion

This article introduced practitioners to the research on the impact of bias-based beliefs on marginalized youth school experiences, as well as an understanding of the three bias-based beliefs that seep into pedagogy (i.e., the practice and method of teaching) and school practice (e.g., programs, team structures and purpose, staffing arrangements). The exploration of these beliefs in this article is about defining them and encouraging practitioners to consider ways in which to explore minimizing the presence of these beliefs (Fergus, 2016a), particularly as part of reform efforts being used to solve disproportionality in special education, suspension, and gifted programs. For example, there needs to be further consideration made in the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention Supports such that practitioner bias of good and bad behavior is not codified based on deficit thinking notions of race and income. Also, consideration needs to

be made in the manner in which Restorative Justice practices are able to manage conflicts that emerge in school environments latent with racialized patterns such as high turnover rates of White teachers, absence of rigorous curricula, principals with a get-tough approach to all student behaviors, among others.

A way in which to understand the importance of knowing how these bias-based beliefs into practice is to consider Feldman and Pentland's (2003) notion of ostensive and performative components in organizational processes. Feldman and Pentland frame school processes as involving two components—the ostensive component (the ideal process) and the performative component (the actual practice of the process). As the terms allude, for every process there is what we imagine it should be and how it will be executed—the ostensive; and then there is the actual practice of a process—the performative. These concepts assist in understanding when bias-based beliefs can emerge. For example, during observations of professional learning communities (PLC) throughout a school district with 10 schools, one elementary PLC team were reviewing a sample of student work utilizing a protocol to guide them in their discussion. While looking at the outcome patterns of the student work, the team discovered the student eligible for free/reduced lunch were achieving far below other students and one teacher stated, "Come on we need to understand that these kids are poor; its hard for them to learn. The parents don't even show that they care about the college readiness stuff we send home." Though PLC research has clearly established the differing mechanics of a good PLC (i.e., the ostensive component or ideal), the performative component, as my example alludes, showcases the presence of deficit thinking can derail an effective practice. We also argue that the ostensive or ideal component of PLC was framed without the consideration of how a color-blind pedagogical lens can circumvent such a process. Moving forward, the challenge for practitioners is to establish mechanisms in which to understand the dimensions of how bias-based beliefs appear in pedagogy, create opportunities to diminish such bias, firmly develop practitioner

self-efficacy (Fergus, 2016a), and develop new equity principles that replace the need for these biases, and encourage healthy culture and climate for marginalized student populations.

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education: 5-year trends. *Journal Child Family Study*, 23, 118–127.

Additional Resources

1. **Bonilla-Silva, E. (2006).** *Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and persistence of racial inequality in America.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

This book provides an overview of color-blindness as it exists and operates in American society. The book provides accounts of how such a perspective organizes the manner in which Whites view racial topics.

2. **Fergus, E. (2016b).** *Solving disproportionality and achieving equity: A leader's guide to using data to change hearts and minds.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

This book provides an overview of how disproportionality in special education, gifted programs, and suspension operates. The book provides an explanation of how bias-based beliefs set the stage for disproportionality and in order to solve it,

practitioners need tools for changing the school climate.

3. **Wing Sue, D. (2015).** *Race Talk and The Conspiracy of Silence: Understanding and Facilitating Difficult Dialogues on Race.* Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

Unspoken social rules determine much of what people say and do at home, at school, and at work with clients and coworkers. Often, these rules are good for society—they allow people to get along with one another in the world. But occasionally, these hidden rules have a detrimental impact, and in those situations the rules must be brought to light and eliminated. In avoiding this emotionally charged topic, we usually have good intentions—a concern for politeness, a desire not to offend—but Dr. Derald Wing Sue's research has shown that people do far more harm than good when they stay silent about race.



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