



National Center  
on Response to  
Intervention

## RTI and Disproportionate Representation in Special Education - An Annotated Bibliography

November 2009

### Categorized by Practitioner-oriented vs. Research-oriented Articles

#### *Practitioner-Oriented*

Brown, D. F. (2003). Urban teachers' use of culturally responsive management strategies. *Theory into Practice*, 42(4), 277-282.

Describes the management strategies of urban teachers that work with cultural and ethnic minority students. The article emphasizes creating a caring classroom community by showing genuine interest; gaining student cooperation by being consistently assertive and explicitly stating expectations; and, respecting, understanding, and utilizing student's communication styles.

Cartledge, G. & Kourea, L. (2008). Culturally responsive classrooms for culturally diverse students with and at risk for disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 74(3), 351-371.

Emphasizes the need for culturally responsive classrooms, which include: a) cultural competence of teachers; b) culturally responsive effective instruction; and, c) culturally appropriate development of social behaviors. Authors primarily underscore the need to develop culturally competent teachers, which is linked to the transformation of education.

Garcia, S. B. & Ortiz, A. A. (2006). *Preventing disproportionate representation: Culturally and linguistically responsive prereferral interventions*. National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems. Retrieved August 20, 2009 from [http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Pre-referral\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Pre-referral_Brief.pdf), 1-20.

In this brief, the authors discuss and prescribe methods to address four key elements of culturally and linguistically responsive pre-referral interventions for culturally and linguistically diverse students. These elements are: (1) preventing school underachievement and failure; (2) early intervention for struggling learners; (3) diagnostic/prescriptive teaching; and, (4) availability of general education problem-solving support systems.



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Green, T. D. (2005). Promising prevention and early intervention strategies to reduce overrepresentation of African American students in special education. *Preventing School Failure*, 49(3), 33-41.

Discusses ways to adapt Ortiz's (2002) "Prevention of School Failure and Early Intervention for English Learners" to meet the needs of African American learners. The author presents and advocates for culturally responsive prevention and early intervention strategies that include cultural brokers.

Harry, B. & Klingner, J. (2007). Discarding the deficit model. *Educational Leadership*, 16-21.

Discusses how ambiguity and subjectivity in special education categories, particularly in learning disabilities and emotional/behavioral disorders, contribute to the disproportionate placement of minorities in special education. The negative effects of having a disability and social/cultural deficit lens when evaluating students is discussed. The article promotes a view of student difficulties as human variation rather than pathology.

Kea, C. D. & Utley, C. A. (1998). To teach me is to know me. *The Journal of Special Education*, 1(32), 44-47.

Proposes three solutions to the continuing problem of disproportionate representation of multicultural students in special education programs: (1) training of culturally and linguistically diverse teachers in teacher preparation programs; (2) inclusion of multicultural education perspectives in special education; and, (3) the implementation of culturally responsive instruction in classroom settings.

Richards, H. V., Brown, A. F., & Forde, T. B. (2006). *Addressing diversity in schools: Culturally responsive pedagogy*. National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems. Retrieved August 20, 2009 from [http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.nccrest.org/Briefs/Diversity_Brief.pdf), 1-16.

Gives a brief introduction to culturally responsive pedagogy by answering what it is and why it is needed. The article then acknowledges the areas where reforms must occur to make institutions more culturally responsive. Finally, it details how teachers and instruction can become more culturally responsive.

Salend, S. J. & Taylor, L. S. (2002). Cultural perspectives: Missing pieces in the functional assessment process. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 38(2), 104-112.

Details guidelines for conducting culturally sensitive functional behavioral assessments (FBA). A FBA is a person-centered problem-solving process that helps educators and family members develop a plan to change student behavior by examining the causes and functions of the behavior and identifying strategies that address the conditions in which the behavior is most likely and least likely to occur.

Salend, S. J., & Garrick Duhaney, L. M. (2005). Understanding and addressing the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 40(4), 213-221.

Addresses four questions surrounding disproportionality: (1) what is it?; (2) what factors contribute to it?; (3) what can educators do?; and, (4) how can educators evaluate their success at addressing it?

Salend, S. J., Garrick Duhaney, L. M., & Montgomery, W. (2002). A comprehensive approach to identifying and addressing issues of disproportionate representation. *Remedial and Special Education*, 23(5), 289-299.

This article gives guidelines for examining and addressing issues related to the disproportionate representation of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: (1) maintain a database to examine issues related to disproportionate representation; (2) offer equal access to quality pre-referral and ancillary services; (3) revise assessment practices; (4) diversify the composition of the multidisciplinary planning team and offer training; (5) use culturally responsive curricula and instructional strategies and materials; (6) use culturally appropriate behavior management strategies; (7) promote family involvement and empowerment; (8) recruit and retain a diverse staff; and, (9) prepare educators to work with diverse learners.

Weinstein, C., Curran, M., & Tomlinson-Clark, S. (2003). Culturally responsive classroom management: Awareness into action. *Theory into Practice*, 42(4), 269-276.

Discusses fundamental assumptions and strategies for implementing culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM). The fundamental assumptions are: (1) recognizing our cultural beliefs, biases, and assumptions; (2) acknowledging the cultural, racial, ethnic, and class differences among others; and, (3) understanding the ways schools reflect and perpetuate discriminatory practices of the larger society. Strategies include: (1) creating a physical setting that supports academic and social goals; (2) establishing expectations of behavior; (3) communicating with students in culturally consistent ways; (4) developing a caring classroom environment; (5) working with families; and, (6) using appropriate interventions to assist students with behavior problems.

### ***Practitioners Who Want To Learn More***

Artiles, A. J. (1998). The dilemma of difference: Enriching the disproportionality discourse with theory and context. *Journal of Special Education*, 32(1), 32-37.

Describes an underlying aspect of disproportionate representation, the dilemma of difference, and discusses three unstated assumptions about difference that permeate disproportionate representation: (1) difference is intrinsic, not a comparison; (2) the observer can see without a culturally based perspective; and, (3) other perspectives are irrelevant and the observed person's worldview is not related to how others treat him or her. Finally, the author makes some recommendations to address the issue.

Artiles, A. J., Harry, B., Reschly, D. J., & Chinn, P. C. (2002). Over-identification of students of color in special education: A critical overview. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 4(1), 3-10.

Presents an overview of the over-representation of students of color in special education programs. The article begins with an outline of the history of the problem and discusses its magnitude. The authors then identify several forces that shape the problem such as poverty, structural factors, instructional and assessment issues, and the cultural discontinuity between teachers and students. It concludes with a brief discussion about ways to address over-representation.

Artiles, A. & Trent, S. C. (1994). Overrepresentation of minority students in special education: A continuing debate. *Journal of Special Education*, 4(27), 410-437.

This article reviews the historical overrepresentation of Latino and African-American students in special education; examines the influence of court cases, debates about systemic issues, demographic and socioeconomic changes, the construction of minority students' school failure, and the fallacy of the cultural diversity-disability analogy; and offers solutions. [Description retrieved from NCCRESt's website: <http://nccrest.edreform.net/resource/18562>.]

Coutinho, M. J. & Oswald, D. P. (2000). Disproportionate representation in special education: A synthesis and recommendations. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 9(1), 135-156.

This synthesis summarizes historical perspectives and current knowledge about disproportionate representation with respect to: (1) definitions of disproportionate representation and related issues of interpretation; (2) national and state-level estimates of disproportionality for four ethnic groups; (3) legal, policy, research and teacher education responses to disproportionality; and, (4) hypothesized causes and predictors of disproportionality.

Fordham, S. & Ogbu, J. U. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the burden of "acting white." *Urban Review*, 18(3), 176-206.

Discusses a perspective that suggests African American students do not perform well in school for fear of being accused of 'acting white,' and thereby becoming estranged from their culture.

Gay, G. (2002). Culturally responsive teaching in special education for ethnically diverse students: Setting the stage. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 15(6), 613-629.

Grounded in the ecological perspective on disability, this article advocates the use of culturally responsive teaching (CRT). It discusses two obstacles to CRT: negative teacher attitudes and expectations for students of color and confusing diversity with disability. It proposes four necessary reforms to implement CRT: critical cultural consciousness of self and others, culturally centered classroom environment, communal learning, and multicultural curriculum and culturally congruent instruction.

Goldstein, M. J. & Noguera, P. A. (2006). Designing for diversity: Incorporating cultural competence in prevention programs for urban youth. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 111, 29-40.

Provides research-based suggestions for culturally tailoring substance abuse prevention programs. The study suggests that prevention programs are more likely to be effective if they incorporate members of the recipient group in program planning, development, and delivery and ensure that the program takes into account the targeted group's language, culture, class, and environment.

Gutierrez, K. D. & Rogoff, B. (2003). Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice. *Educational Researcher*, 32(5), 19-25.

Proposes an alternative method to the cultural styles approach, named cultural-historical approach. Whereas the cultural styles approach is similar to a trait approach in which there is a built in relationship between learning style and group membership, the cultural-historical approach asserts that individuals acquire a learning style due to the degree of involvement with the common practices of cultural communities.

Harris-Murri, N., King, K. & Rostenberg, D. (2006). Reducing disproportionate minority representation in special education programs for students with emotional disturbances: Toward a culturally responsive response to intervention model. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 29(4), 779-799.

Discusses the need for a culturally responsive RTI (CRRTI) to reduce disproportionality in special education programs for students with emotional disturbances (ED). Defines and gives an overview of RTI and ED. Discusses four challenges in using a culturally responsive RTI: (1) problem identification and problem analysis stage; (2) moving beyond the conceptualization of the problem as "within-child;" (3) understanding the reason behind the referral; and, (4) determining appropriate assessment. Furthermore, the article discusses several dimensions of a CRRTI: (1) home, school and community connections; (2) professional development; (3) curriculum and instruction; and, (4) assessment.

Klingner, J. K., Artiles, A. J., Kozleski, E., Harry, B., Zion, S., Tate, W., Durán, G. Z., & Riley, D. (2005). Addressing the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education through culturally responsive educational systems. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 13(38), 1-42.

Gives a thorough introduction to the problem of disproportionate representation in special education through a discussion of key topics: calculating disproportionate representation, “judgmental” categories, intrinsic deficits, contextual issues, power and hegemony, assumptions about intelligence, assumptions of behavior, the wait to fail model, and the research to practice gap. Finally, it discusses culturally responsive educational systems and the interrelated domains of policies, practices, and people that should be addressed if change is to occur.

Kozleski, E. B., Engelbrecht, P., Hess, R., Swart, E., Eloff, I., Oswald, M., Molina, A., & Jain, S. (2008). Where differences matter: A cross-cultural analysis of family voice in special education. *The Journal of Special Education*, 42(1), 26-35.

Conducted a cross-cultural analysis between the US and South Africa on how implicit rules for professional-family relationships within the school system affected the decision to place children in special education. The study found that U.S. families tended to struggle with the process of special education more than their South African counterparts.

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. (2009). *Overview document: Prevention of disproportionate special education representation using response to intervention*. Washington, DC: Reschly, D. J. 1-27.

Provides an overview of disproportionality and the RTI process by discussing the legal history, statistics, misconceptions, the connection between disproportionality and RTI, and the RTI process. The article advocates for prevention as the most effective strategy to reduce disproportionality.

Samuels, C. A. (2007). Minorities in special education studied by U.S. panel. *Education Week*, 27(15), 1-3.

This short article reports on a hearing by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission on minority overrepresentation in special education. It discusses the issue of minority overrepresentation and how early reading instruction may be the key to preventing inappropriate special education placements for any child.

Shealey, M. W. & Lue, M. S. (2006). Why are all the Black kids still in special education? Revisiting the issue of disproportionate representation. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 8(21), 3-9.

Through the lens of an urban elementary school currently struggling with the best way to address disproportionate representation, the authors discuss referral and placement in special education, the quality and efficacy of special education, teacher quality, and student outcomes. Finally, the authors propose a culturally responsive school reform policy.

Skiba, R. J., Simmons, A. B., Ritter, S., Gibb, A. C., Rausch, M. K., Cuadrado, J. & Chung, C. (2008). Achieving equity in special education: History, status, and current challenges. *Exceptional Children*, 74(3), 264-288.

Provides an historical overview of the status of minority disproportionality in special education and measurement issues. Also draws upon the conceptual framework of cultural reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976)—individuals become part of institutional patterns that reproduce the status quo without consciously being aware of it.

Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 613-629.

Proposes an alternative view on African American students' disengagement from education. The authors believe that African American students' disengagement from education was in response to 'stereotype threat'—fear of confirming the stereotype that African Americans do not do well educationally causes some students to underachieve during test-taking, which in turn effects their achievement.

Taylor, S. V. (2005). Restrictiveness and race in special education: Socio-cultural and linguistic considerations. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal*, 39(1), 34-43.

Discusses Fierros and Blomberg's article, "Restrictiveness and Race in Special Education Placements in For-Profit and Non-Profit Charter School in California." Moreover, the article discusses and lists potential sources of bias, responsibilities and characteristics of a successful culturally responsive teacher. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing socio-cultural and linguistic characteristics of students.

**Research-oriented**

Artiles, A. J. & Bal, A. (2008). The next generation of disproportionality research: Toward a comparative model in the study of equity in ability differences. *Journal of Special Education*, 42(1), 4-14.

Theorizes the problem of disproportionate representation as it relates to equity concerns in educational systems' response to differences and proposes a comparative model to study it. The article outlines the main research approaches used to study this problem and identify important gaps in the literature. The comparative model draws from interdisciplinary culture theory and pays attention to globalization and post-colonial circumstances.

Bahr, M. W. & Fuchs, D. (1991). Are teachers' perceptions of difficult-to-teach students racially biased? *School Psychology Review*, 20(4), 599-609.

With a sample of 40 (20 white and 20 black) male students nominated as the most "difficult-to-teach" by their respective teachers, this study examines whether teachers' perceptions of students as difficult-to-teach is racially biased. The study employs a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative interviews of teachers and quantitative analysis of data. Findings suggest that a significant larger number of black than white difficult-to-teach students are rated more appropriate for referral by both black and white general education teachers. The conclusion provided by the authors is that there is no statistically significant difference between the black and white teachers' perceptions of difficult-to-teach students.

Chamberlain, S. P. (2005). An interview with Alfredo Artiles and Beth Harry: Issues of overrepresentation and educational equity for culturally and linguistically diverse students. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 41(2), 110-113.

Discusses why minority groups are disproportionality placed in special education. The issues discussed include the historical socioeconomic patterns of institutional bias, parallel design of special and general education, problems with general education, labeling, and the definitions of disabilities.

Deschenes, S., Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (2001). Mismatch: Historical perspectives on schools and students who don't fit them. *Teachers College Record*, 103(4), 525-547.

Discusses why educators should focus on adapting schools to the students, addressing social inequalities that extend beyond the classroom, and undertaking comprehensive changes that take no features of current schools for granted. The article also discusses the history of students who have not been able to do what educators wanted them to do and summarizes four major explanations for why children fail in school: individual deficits or incompetence, families, inefficiency in schools, and cultural difference.

Eitle, T. M. (2002). Special education or racial segregation: Understanding the variation in the representation of Black students in educable mentally handicapped programs. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 4(43), 575-605.

The disproportionate representation of African American students in special education programs has been well documented, yet explanations for the overrepresentation are rare. Using a unique sample of U.S. public school districts (N=981), this article examines the effects of local racial and political-economic structures, school district characteristics, and school desegregation politics on the representation of African American students in educable mentally handicapped (EMH) programs. [Description retrieved from NCCREST's website: <http://nccrest.edreform.net/resource/17941>.]

Fierros, E. G. & Blomberg, N. A. (2005). Restrictiveness and race in special education placements in for-profit and non-profit charter schools in California. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal*, 3(1), 1-16.

Examines the condition of for-profit and non-profit charter schools in California to understand whether a charter school's for-profit or non-profit status can lead to differential enrollment patterns of students with special education enrollment. This empirical study found that racial/ethnic representation of special education students mirrors the larger school population in California. While both for-profit and non-profit charter schools show a substantially smaller special education enrollment as a percentage of their enrollment, there was little variability between racial and ethnic enrollment in charter schools and their corresponding special education enrollment.

Gravois, T. A. & Rosenfield, S.A. (2006). Impact of instructional consultation teams on the disproportionate referral and placement of minority students in special education. *Remedial and Special Education*, 27(1), 42-52.

Using a sample of 22 schools, this study examines the effect of instructional consultation teams (ICTs) on disproportionate referral and placement of minority children in special educations. As a particular model of intervention services, the primary goal of ICTs is to create and maintain student success within the general education environment by supporting the classroom teacher. Support is provided through focus on improving the quality of instruction and intervention provided to students. This study concludes that the implementation of ITC reduces the total number of referrals and placement of students in special education.

Hosp, J. L. & Reschly, D. J. (2004). Disproportionate representation of minority students in special education: Academic, demographic, and economic predictors. *Exceptional Children*, 70(2), 185-199.

In this empirical study, achievement variables were added to demographic and economic variables in an effort to better understand patterns of disproportionate representation of minority groups in special education. For mental retardation, the economic variables were generally the strongest predictor across racial/ethnic groups. For emotional disturbance, the demographic variables were generally the strongest predictor. For learning disabilities, the academic variables were generally the strongest predictor. The authors advocate for stronger efforts to change patterns of disproportionate representation by focusing on the crucial, alterable variable of academic achievement.

Jordan, K. (2005). Discourses of difference and the overrepresentation of Black students in special education. *Journal of African American History*, 90(1/2), 128-149.

This essay examines the discourses that undergird social constructions of differences among adolescent African American students, especially males. The article touches on racial difference, poverty, educational inequality, disproportionality, teachers' social positions, construction of difference, management of differences, special education and culturally relative instruction.

Klingner, J. K. & Edwards, P. A. (2006). Cultural considerations with response to intervention models. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(1), 108-117.

Discusses the use of a culturally responsive RTI framework based upon Wiley's (1996) framework that emphasizes accommodation, incorporation, and adaptation. Moreover, discusses the need to have an evidence-based intervention that focuses on what works with whom, by whom, and in what contexts. The article also looks at fidelity, generalizability, non-responders, and proposes a four-tiered culturally responsive RTI model.

Lee, C. D. (1998). Culturally responsive pedagogy and performance-based assessment. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 67(3), 268-279.

Discusses the need for "authentic" culturally responsive performance-based assessment from a cognitive and cultural perspective. The cognitive argument emphasizes a culture's prior knowledge and strategies that the student may draw on to tackle problems. The cultural argument discusses a culture's learning style, educational foundation, and the political dimension of education. African Americans are the subjects used to support the articles assertions. The article emphasizes A. W. Boykin's theories and summarizes his concept of the Afro-cultural ethos.

MacMillan, D. L., Gresham, F. M, Lopez, M. F., & Bocian, K. M. (1999). Comparison of students nominated for prereferral interventions by ethnicity and gender. *Journal of Special Education*, 30(2), 133-151.

This quantitative study examines a sample of 150 students in grades 2 through 4 who were nominated for referral for intervention. There are three areas this investigation seeks to address: 1) to access whether there are specific types of student problems that precipitate nomination for referral; 2) to examine whether gender or ethnicity explains variation in nomination; and, 3) to determine whether minority group children are nominated by teachers when their achievement and/or intelligence test scores are significantly higher than those of their majority group counterparts. The findings of this study suggest that the students nominated for referral do, in fact, exhibit serious academic and/or behavioral problems. Furthermore, the findings suggest that teachers are not biased in their referrals of students. The study did not find any significant difference in referral by gender.

Oswald, D. P., Coutinho, M. J., Best, A., & Singh, N. N. (1999). Ethnic representation in special education: The influence of school-related economic and demographic variables. *The Journal of Special Education*, 32(4), 194-206.

This empirical study describes the disproportionate representation of African American students as seriously emotionally disturbed and mildly mentally retarded. Furthermore, it explores the extent to which economic, demographic, and educational variables at the district level were associated with disproportional identification for an ethnic group. The results indicated that African American students were about 2.4 times more likely to be identified as mild mental retardation and about 1.5 times more likely to be identified as seriously emotionally disturbed than their non-African American peers. Moreover, economic and demographic variables were significant predictors of disproportionate representation.

Patton, J. M. (1998). The disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education: Looking behind the curtain for understanding and solutions. *Journal of Special Education*, 32, 25-31.

This article uses a critical-theory model of inquiry to discuss how certain basic assumptions, worldviews, beliefs, and epistemologies used by some special education knowledge producers serve to perpetuate disproportionality. The author suggests that the voices of qualitatively different knowledge producers, who are culturally and interculturally competent, and knowledge producers who can employ a language of ethical critique, justice, and caring while injecting social, political, economic, historical, and ethical discourse into their work are needed to bring resolution to this persistent challenge of disproportionality.

Skiba, R., Simmons, A., Ritter, S., Kohler, K., Henderson, M., & Wu, T. (2006). The context of minority disproportionality: Practitioner perspectives on special education referral. *Teachers College Record*, 108(7), 1424-1459.

This qualitative study, guided by the cultural reproduction theory, interviewed 66 educators (teachers, administrators, and related services personnel in seven urban and near-urban school districts) to gain an understanding of the local processes that may contribute to special education disproportionality. Several major themes emerged: (1) the factors that create and maintain disproportionality are highly complex and interactive; (2) teachers and schools feel unprepared to meet the needs of economically disadvantaged students; (3) White educators were reticent about discussing the issue of race; and, (4) referring students to special education was perceived as the only resource available for helping students.

Zhang, D. & Katsiyannis, A. (2002). Minority representation in special education: A persistent challenge. *Remedial and Special Education*, 23(3), 180-187.

This empirical study examines minority representation in special education across states and regions for all disabilities. It addresses the variability, in light of minority representation, in the total student population and state poverty rates. The data were analyzed descriptively, which does not allow for causal inferences. It does indicate that disproportionate representation is still a persistent challenge and African Americans continue to have the highest representation of all groups.

## National Center on Response to Intervention

If you have comments and questions about this workgroup and its activities, please visit our website [www.rti4success.org](http://www.rti4success.org) or contact The National Center on Response to Intervention at [rticenter@air.org](mailto:rticenter@air.org).

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