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## **A Resource Guide for Teacher Use to Address Issues of Disproportionality in Grades K-5 in Urban School Districts**

Kelie R. Kegley

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A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR  
TEACHER USE TO ADDRESS ISSUES OF  
DISPROPORTIONALITY IN GRADES K-5  
IN URBAN SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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A Project Report  
Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington University

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In Partial fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Education

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by  
Kelie R. Kegley  
July, 1998

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The purpose of this study was to develop a resource guide for teacher use to address issues of disproportionality in grades K-5 in urban school districts. To accomplish this purpose, a review of literature and current research on disproportionality in academic achievement in urban public schools was conducted. This review focused on effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices as they related to disproportionality in grades K-5. Additionally, information from selected urban school districts with disproportionality was obtained and analyzed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express her heartfelt thanks to her husband Dayton Griffin for his continual love and support during this project and her entire course of study. His belief in her has made these accomplishments possible.

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CHAPTER ONE  
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

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Introduction

The low academic achievement of African American and Hispanic students is a national crisis. Just as we are coming into a technological and information-based era that requires more skilled and talented individuals to emerge from our schools, we are writing off a significantly large portion of the U.S. population as unemployable and designating them as permanent welfare recipients (Stevens, 1995, p.53).

As suggested in this statement by Stevens, the academic achievement gap of America's urban school children has been one of the most critical challenges facing public education today (Ferguson & Casserly, 1998).

Test scores by black and Hispanic students have remained below those of whites. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show a large gap in achievement between African American and Hispanic students on the one hand and white students on the other. White students, at ages 9, 13, and 17 have performed at a higher level in reading, writing, science, and mathematics than the same age groups of African American and Hispanic students (Stevens, 1995, p.53). "Even though in the 1970's and 80's African American and Hispanic students' scores improved while white students' achievement remained stagnant, the gap has been unacceptably large" (Ferguson & Casserly, 1998, p. 13).

Ferguson and Casserly (1998) further suggested, "These gaps can only be eliminated if there is a concentrated effort by the states, federal government, local government, parents, businesses, and the community to play a major role in the process" (p.13).

According to Edmonds (1998), (as cited in Ferguson and Casserly, 1998, p.1):



We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

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### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to develop a resource guide for teacher use to address issues of disproportionality in grades K-5 in urban school districts. To accomplish this purpose, a review of literature and current research on disproportionality in academic achievement in urban public schools was conducted. This review focused on effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices as they related to disproportionality in grades K-5. Additionally, information from selected urban school districts with disproportionality was obtained and analyzed.

## Limitations of the Study

For purposes of this study, it was necessary to set the following limitations:

1. Scope: The resource guide for teacher use in addressing issues of disproportionality in urban school districts grades K-5 was designed for use in teacher trainings and workshops.
2. Research: The preponderance of research and literature reviewed for the purpose of this study was limited to the past ten (10) years. Additionally, selected urban school districts and research facilities in Western Washington and Oregon were contacted and invited to submit information they presented to teachers to address disproportionality in academic achievement in grades K-5.

## Definitions of Terms

Significant terms used in the context of this study have been defined as follows:

1. Academic Achievement Gap: The difference in academic achievement between groups of children as measured by test scores (Ferguson & Casserly, 1998).
2. At Risk: A term referring to students whose lives are influenced by factors such as poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and mental illness (Benard, 1997).
3. Cognitive Style: The ways in which one acquires, processes, analyzes, and displays knowledge. It encompasses more than just "learning style." Cognitive style includes any factors or "behaviors" related to, affecting, or stemming from the learning process (McIntyre, 1996).
4. Disproportionality: The over-representation of the number of students of a particular ethnic group in any given area of education such as low academic achievement (Ackerman, 1996).

5. Learning Styles: The manner in which a person acquires and processes knowledge (McIntyre, 1996).
6. Opportunity to Learn: A concept which focuses on specific conditions of teaching and learning that generate high academic achievement. It encompasses standards for instructional quality, and standards for school and family support. The emphasis is on what teachers do in their classrooms and whether or not students are given sufficient access to information and resources to enable them to meet set standards. It addresses standards of student performance and behavior, along with assessment (Stevens, 1995).

CHAPTER TWO  
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND  
INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM SELECTED SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Introduction

The review of research, literature, and information obtained from selected school districts summarized in Chapter Two (2) has been organized to address:

1. Disproportionality as a Crucial Issue in Education
2. Reasons for Disproportionality
3. Suggestions for Decreasing the Academic Achievement Gap
4. Information Obtained from Selected School Districts
5. Summary

Data current within the past ten (10) years was identified through an Educational Resources Information Centers (E.R.I.C.) computer search. Significant resource documents and related literature was also obtained from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Additionally, information from selected

urban school districts, where disproportionality is an issue, was obtained and analyzed.

### Disproportionality as a Crucial Issue in Education

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Disproportionality has been identified by Howard and Hammond (1985) as a crucial issue in urban school districts today. They contended that disproportionality is one of the greatest challenges for teachers in ethnically diverse communities.

Disproportionality, as used in this project, has been defined by Ackerman (1996) as, "The over-representation of the number of students of a particular ethnic group in any given area of education such as low academic achievement" (p.1).

Howard and Hammond (1985) suggested that the effects of the performance gap between white and black children are reflected in the larger society and cannot be addressed in isolation. Howard and Hammond further stated:

Since the people who shape policy in the United States, from the White House to the local elementary school, have not

addressed the problems of performance and development of blacks and other minorities, all Americans will face the consequences: Instability, disharmony, and a national loss of the potential productivity of more than a quarter of the population (p.21).

According to Knapp, Turnbull and Shields (1990), children of poverty have experienced failure disproportionately in their early school years. As a result, they have often left school ill-prepared for adult life.

Howard and Hammond (1985) found, "The traditional explanations of laziness or inferiority on the one hand; racism, discrimination, and biased tests on the other, have been inaccurate and unhelpful" (p.18). Howard and Hammond emphasized that clear thinking about disproportionality has been inhibited by the tendency to equate performance with ability. "Acknowledging the performance gap is, in many minds, tantamount to inferring that blacks and other minority groups are intellectually inferior, but inferior performance and inferior ability are not the same thing" (Howard & Hammond, 1985, p.18).

Charting the Right Course (1998), a report written by ACT and The Council of Great City Schools, concluded that substantial gaps remain in academic achievement between urban students and suburban; including some that urban school policy makers can do something about, such as, increasing standards and providing better professional development.

“It is clear that urban schools will have to improve faster than national averages to completely close the gaps. Otherwise, we will have a nation in which some students are permanently and purposefully relegated to a second-class future” (Ferguson & Casserly, 1998, p.13).

#### Reasons for Disproportionality

Gilbert and Gay (1985) contended that school leaders must stop operating on the assumption that all the reasons for children of color having problems with school rests with the children and accept the fact that much of the responsibility rests with the school system.



Many black and Hispanic children's problems with school stem from the classroom climate, the context in which teaching and learning occur. Problems develop between educators and black and Hispanic students on issues of cultural values, the expectations of the school, and what are considered the normal procedures of teaching and learning (Gilbert & Gay, 1985, p.134).

As Gilbert and Gay indicated, many teachers and principals have been unaware of the areas of conflict between the culture of the school and that of children raised in urban black and Hispanic communities. McIntyre (1996) found that schools typically have promoted a style of cognition consistent with that of the European American cultural group.

Given that culturally different students have most often been taught information in a European-American context, and presentational style that has been frequently opposed to their preferred manner of learning, it has been no surprise then that minority culture pupils have commonly failed to learn as well as majority culture pupils (McIntyre, 1996, p.355).

Gilbert and Gay (1985) contended, "When different social systems interact, the normative rules of procedure have conflicted" (p.134). Increasingly, culture, language, and social factors have been recognized as having impacted learning (Gilbert & Gay, 1985).

McIntyre (1996) suggested, "Culture has been a major, if not the primary factor that has affected the development of cognitive style" (p.355). "Cognitive patterns have depended, to a large extent, on which ones have been modeled and reinforced by childrearing practices; practices that commonly vary by culture" (McIntyre, 1996, p.355).

According to Fashola and Slavin (1998), "When closely examining the reasons for disproportionality, we should focus on programs designed to affect core aspects of school functioning including curriculum, instruction, and assessment" (p.371).

Gilbert and Gay (1985) stated:

The speaking and listening style of black culture has been one source of misunderstanding and conflict between black students and school staff. For African-Americans, spoken language has been the primary mode of communication,

whereas the schools have tended to stress written communication. When black children become involved affectively and physically as well, teachers have been puzzled and put off by all the emotion and movement. They have seen ~~these aspects of behavior as unnecessary to the instructional~~ process and have been inclined to eliminate them for the sake of a more orderly climate for learning (p.135).

As Gilbert and Gay (1985) indicated, the interactional style of African-Americans has traditionally conflicted with that of the public schools. Establishing the context or setting for a performance before engaging in an assignment has been found to be commonplace for black students. For this reason, African American children have ended up spending less actual time on instructional tasks than their white counterparts.

As Knapp, Turnbull, and Shields (1990) found, ethnic minority students are frequently identified as low-achievers. Several common arrangements for instructing diverse groups place low-achieving children together and separate them from those who do better, perpetuating disproportionality.

In like manner, Cooper (1998) has suggested, "Tracking and ability grouping in many school communities have served as the major vehicle to perpetuate racial division" (p.1). "Tracking and ability grouping can lead to identifiable groups of students, disproportionately students of color and low income students, receiving an unequal distribution of educational access and opportunity" (Cooper, 1998, p.1).

Gilbert and Gay (1985) contended that the procedures, the climate, and the style of test taking in school are all foreign to black students.

Black students need to shift from a verbally, aesthetically, and behaviorally active mode of demonstrating achievement to a written, utilitarian, and essentially sedentary performance style. They must shift from cooperative and communal to individual and competitive efforts; from informal to formal settings; from self-paced, flexible work arrangements to highly structured, rigidly timed work sessions (Gilbert & Gay, 1985, p.137).

On the other hand, Knapp, Turnbull, and Shields (1990) found that there is controversy about the reasons for disproportionality. They discovered that a great deal of research and practice has been predicated on the assumptions that disadvantaged students are deficient in their preparation for school and that their families have given them a bad start in life. These assumptions, in effect, locate the problem in the learner and his or her background (Knapp, Turnbull & Shields, 1990).

Knapp, Turnbull, and Shields (1990) suggested that these conventional assumptions can be criticized on two general grounds:

First, stereotypical ideas about the capabilities of a child who is poor or who belongs to an ethnic minority group will detract from an accurate assessment of the child's real educational problems and potential. Second, by focusing on family deficiencies, educators may miss the strengths of the cultures from which many disadvantaged students come (p.4).

The adverse consequences of these conceptions include low expectations for what these students can accomplish in academic work; failure to examine carefully what the schools do that

exacerbates these learning problems; and misdiagnosis of the learning problems these students face (Knapp, Turnbull & Shields, 1990).

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### Suggestions for Decreasing the Academic Achievement Gap

“Closing the academic achievement gap, while complex, is not impossible. The key elements we need for success are collaboration, and cooperation among families, schools, and students” (Stevens, 1995, p. 61).

Gilbert and Gay (1985) contended that teachers must set high academic standards for all children. “Teachers need to modify the means used to achieve learning outcomes, not change the intended outcomes. Then they need to hold the students strictly accountable for meeting those standards themselves” (Gilbert & Gay, 1985, p.133).

Fashola and Slavin (1998) indicated that rather than remediate students’ deficits, students at risk of school failure must be

accelerated and given the kind of high expectations curriculum typical of programs for the gifted and talented.

Foster (1995) suggested that effective teachers in multi-cultural settings link classroom activities to students' out-of-school experiences and incorporate familiar cultural and communicative patterns into their classroom practices, routines, and activities. "Students should be encouraged to bring community experiences into the classroom" (Foster, 1995, p.578).

When having looked at eight exemplary schools for language-minority students, Minicucci et al (1995) found that the exemplary sites developed a meaningful curriculum that made connections across disciplines, built real-life applications into the curriculum, related the curriculum to student experiences, and emphasized depth of understanding rather than breadth of knowledge. The schools embraced the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students honoring the multicultural quality of the student population. The value placed on students' culture pervaded the classroom curriculum.

Teachers must individualize instruction to meet the students' needs. They should identify the particular student trait that

may require some change in instructional approach; determine whether this trait has implications for the (a) content or material taught, (b) context or physical setting for instruction, or (c) mode or manner of instruction; and define and implement the new instructional modification(s)

(McIntyre, 1996, p.363).

Knapp, Turnbull and Shields (1990) have offered some key concepts to consider when seeking to improve instruction with an ethnically diverse student population.

First of all, teachers need to understand that the disadvantaged child may well bring to school speech patterns, cognitive predispositions, and behavior patterns that do not match the way things are done in school. These students must learn the culture of the school while they are also attempting to master academic tasks. While recognizing that there may be gaps in disadvantaged students' experience, the educator must build on their experience bases and at the same time challenge the children to expand their repertoires of experiences and skills" (Knapp, Turnbull & Shields, 1990, p.5).



This perspective gains support from a decade or more of cognitive research and related theories of learning that portray the learner as an active constructor of knowledge and meaning rather than a passive recipient of information and skills (Knapp, Turnbull, & Shields, 1990).

Rossi and Montgomery (1994) suggested that students at risk need changes in traditional forms of instruction:

In general, these instructional strategies entail a movement away from the passive teacher-lecture, student-listen mode of instruction, to a more active arrangement of learning activities. Effective instruction can take place within and outside the classroom and a personal connection with a teacher can make a difference in whether a student succeeds or fails (p.1).

Knapp, Turnbull and Shields (1990) found that one way to use instruction to decrease disproportionality is to balance teacher-directed and learner-directed instruction.

This balance has much to offer students especially if the goal is to engage students in activities that are intellectually

challenging. The key is to strike the right balance between teacher direction and student responsibility, so that students understand what they are doing, and why. Over time, their capacity for self-regulated learning increases (Knapp, Turnbull & Shields, 1990, p.6).

According to Delpit (1988), "The teacher cannot be the only expert in the classroom. Actual writing for real audiences and real purposes is a vital element in helping students to understand that they have an important voice in their own learning processes" (p.288).

Foster (1995) indicated that what occurs in traditional classrooms encourages competitive behavior and individual achievement. Yet research has shown that tremendous gains have been achieved in schools and classrooms for black students in which learning is organized as a social event, not as a competitive or individual endeavor. Minicucci et al (1995) further supported this point having found that cooperative learning was used extensively in all of the exemplary schools they researched.

Gilbert and Gay (1985) indicated that black children have tended to work together for the benefit of the group. "The pace of the learning effort has been set more by the momentum of the group than by some arbitrarily determined time allocated for the completion of an instructional task" (Gilbert & Gay, 1985, p.134).

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"Assessment is closely related to instruction and achievement. It is critical that teachers' knowledge of their craft include skill in assessment and testing" (Stevens, 1995, p.59). Here Stevens (1995) has suggested that teachers need to know about the variety of assessment strategies available to them. McIntyre (1996) emphasized, "The assessment methods utilized should be a logical extension of the instruction. To determine what has been learned, students should be tested in their preferred way of demonstrating ability and knowledge" (p.363).

According to Gilbert and Gay (1985):

Another way in which educators can create environments that are more conducive to learning for black students is to teach them test-taking skills. The test-taking skills most useful in the black community are verbal artistry, dramatic flair, and

dexterity. Information sharing is important, but the aim is not merely to show what one knows. The quickness, creativity, and style of delivery are also important (p.137).

“Alternative techniques of assessment should supplement, and in some cases replace, standardized testing. These might include audiovisual evaluation, peer evaluation, personal interviews, dramatized performance of skill mastery, and orally administered tests” (Gilbert & Gay, 1985, p.137).

## Information Obtained from Selected School Districts

Six (6) selected school districts and/or research facilities in Western Washington and Oregon were contacted and invited to submit information addressing issues of disproportionality in urban school districts. Specifically, information detailing the following components was solicited:

1. Resource Guides
2. Materials on effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices
3. Current data or statistics
4. Professional development and teacher training ideas

Selected school districts and research facilities contacted included:

- A. Commission On Student Learning: (206) 439-3700
- B. Highline School District: (206) 433-2503
- C. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory: (503) 275-9500
- D. Renton School District: (425) 204-2347
- E. Seattle School District: (206) 298-7050
- F. Tacoma School District: (253) 571-1192

An analysis of information obtained from the above selected school districts and/or research facilities revealed five (5) characteristics about addressing issues of disproportionality. They included:

1. Resource Guides: One (1) of the six (6) school districts had incorporated a resource guide to decrease or eliminate disproportionality.
2. Materials On Effective Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Practices: One (1) of the six (6) school districts and one (1) research facility provided materials on effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.
3. Current Data or Statistics: Two (2) of the six (6) school districts provided current data on issues of disproportionality in their school district.
4. Professional Development and Teacher Training Ideas: Two (2) of the six (6) school districts provided professional development for its educators on issues of disproportionality.

5. Importance of Resource Guide: Five (5) of the six (6) school districts and/or research facilities indicated that a resource guide, materials on effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices, and professional development for educators would be important to address issues of disproportionality, and better meet the needs of all students.

### Summary

The research and literature summarized in Chapter Two (2) supported the following themes:

1. Disproportionality in academic achievement between ethnic minority students and their white counterparts has been found to be a crucial issue in education.
2. A variety of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices have been suggested as reasons for the academic achievement gap between ethnic minorities and white children.

3. Several ideas for decreasing or eliminating the academic achievement gap focused on effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices used by K-5 teachers.
4. Resource guides and teacher training related to disproportionality in academic achievement were uncommon in school districts and research facilities in Western Washington and Oregon, yet school district administrators felt they could be essential in meeting the needs of urban students K-5.



## CHAPTER THREE

### PROCEDURES FOR THE PROJECT

The purpose of this study was to develop a resource guide for teacher use to address issues of disproportionality in grades K-5 in urban school districts. To accomplish this purpose, a review of literature and current research on disproportionality in academic achievement in urban public schools was conducted. This review focused on effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices as they related to disproportionality in grades K-5. Additionally, information from selected urban school districts with disproportionality was obtained and analyzed.

Chapter Three (3) contains background information describing:

1. Need for the project
2. Procedures of the project
3. Planned implementation and assessment of the project

## Need for the Project

The need for this project was influenced by the following considerations:

1. The writer (Kelie R. Kegley), an experienced teacher and assistant administrator in Seattle School District, recognized the need for a resource guide addressing the issue of disproportionality to help teachers entering urban school districts to better meet the needs of all students.

2. During her tenure as a technology specialist and administrative assistant, the writer experienced working with new teachers who had not received training in their preparation courses to address the needs of ethnic minority children who had been achieving at levels significantly below their white counterparts.

3. Current research findings and evidence supported the need for a resource guide addressing disproportionality in academic achievement in urban public schools. A resource guide should assist teachers who are preparing to teach in urban public schools so that they can adjust their curriculum, instruction, and assessment procedures to better meet the needs of all of their students.

4. Information obtained from selected urban school districts and phone conversations with the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Commission on Student Learning indicated that resources and strategies for eliminating disproportionality were uncommon.

5. Undertaking this project coincided with the writer's graduate studies in School Administration at Central Washington University.

### Procedures

To obtain background information essential for developing a resource guide for teacher use to address issues of disproportionality in grades K-5 in urban school districts, an Educational Resources Information Center (E.R.I.C.) computer search was undertaken. Additionally, a hand search of various other sources, including the Internet was conducted. The writer attended a retreat on diversity in urban school districts and attended seminars on disproportionality where she engaged in informal interviews with seminar presenters and participants in her pursuit of additional

information relating to the academic achievement gap in urban public schools. The search for applicable resources on disproportionality lead to telephone contact with various urban school districts, and research centers throughout Western Washington and Oregon including:

- A. Commission On Student Learning
- B. Highline School District
- C. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
- D. Renton School District
- E. Seattle School District
- F. Tacoma School District

#### Planned Implementation and Assessment of the Project

The Resource Guide for Teacher Use To Address Issues of Disproportionality in Grades K-5 in Urban School Districts was designed for field testing and implementation during 1998-1999 in workshops in the Seattle School District. Accordingly, this guide will be evaluated by participating administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Recommendations for improvement will be

considered and may be incorporated into the resource guide. The resource guide will be made available to interested parties upon request.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PROJECT

The Resource Guide for Teacher Use To Address Issues of Disproportionality in Grades K-5 in Urban School Districts designed for purposes of this project has been presented on the following pages in eight sections, which include:

- Section One: Cultural Issues
- Section Two: Curriculum Strategies
- Section Three: Instructional Strategies
- Section Four: Assessment Strategies
- Section Five: School Environment Strategies
- Section Six: Professional Development
- Section Seven: Relationships
- Section Eight: Resources

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Kelie R. Kegley

Central Washington University  
July, 1998

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## SECTION ONE: CULTURAL ISSUES

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## SERVING THE NON-TRADITIONAL CHILD

- Raise, don't lower expectations; we socialize them to expect less of themselves.
  - Model organization for them; show them how you organize your own world and help them organize theirs.
- 
- Model hard work and rigor; praise it, reward it, demand it.
  - Provide experiences and long-range planning. Show them how to break down difficult tasks into manageable parts.
  - Teach them how to learn; show them how to find answers for themselves in the absence of adults.
  - Provide experiences which highlight the importance of support systems; teach constructive use of human and material resources.
  - Establish an atmosphere of meaningful interdependence; design activities which demonstrate the importance of commitment to one another's learning.
  - Give them direct instruction in decision-making; teach how to evaluate alternatives and to engage in meaningful problem solving.
  - Provide direct instruction in study skills and related areas; teach them time management, note-taking and outlining, and the effective use of resources.
  - Provide experiences which facilitate adaptation to new situations; give them the skills to make meaningful transitions from one social system or set of expectations to another.
  - Focus on their strengths as a vehicle for addressing their deficiencies; teach them to use their abilities while not avoiding areas where improvement is needed.

## A PLAN FOR URBAN EDUCATION

To improve urban education and reverse years of neglect, The Great City Schools (1998) recommend:

1. Ensuring that students attending urban schools are held to the same high standards as students from non-urban schools. Districts must work to establish and implement rigorous academic content and performance standards that will apply to all students. Urban leaders must align their districts curricula, instructional practices and assessments to these standards in core subjects.
2. Providing schools with the programs and tools they need to increase achievement. Urban systems must work to provide all students with the instructional materials, equipment, teachers, and technology they need to meet high standards.
3. Strengthening school system leadership, management, and administration and enhance school decision-making. Districts must be more responsible to the community, the schools, the parents and the students.
4. Designing assessment systems that hold everyone accountable for results. Urban leaders must design and implement accountability systems for schools and educators.

5. Ensuring that urban districts have adequate resources to provide all students with opportunities that most other American children have: Programs, services, books, computers, well-trained and well-paid teachers.

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(Adapted from Charting the Right Course: A Report on Urban Student Achievement, 1998)

## WHAT PEOPLE OF COLOR WANT FROM WHITE ALLIES

"Respect"	"Provide information"
"Honesty"	"Don't take it personally"
"Find out about us"	"Don't Make assumptions"
"Don't take over"	"Don't be scared by my anger"
"Resources"	"Your body on the line"
"Understanding"	"Talk to other white people"
"Speak up"	"Teach your children about racism"
"Support"	"Interrupt jokes and comments"
"Take risks"	"Don't ask me to speak for my people"
"Listen"	"Don't assume you know what's best for me"
"Stand by my side"	

(Adapted from Uprooting Racism, 1996)

## STAGE-SETTING

One feature of the interactional style of African-Americans that conflicts with that of traditional schools is the attention to "stage setting" that precedes the performance of a task. Black Americans devote a great deal of energy to establishing the context or setting for a performance before engaging in an assignment.

In the classroom this means that black students do not begin working on an academic assignment immediately after the teacher has finished giving directions. First, they must prepare themselves and the environment, creating an appropriate mood and setting for the performance. To the black student, these are necessary maneuvers in preparing for performance.

### **Stage-setting behaviors may include:**

1. Looking over an assignment in its entirety.
2. Rearranging posture.
3. Elaborately checking pencils, paper and writing space.
4. Asking teachers to repeat directions that have just been given.
5. Checking the perceptions of neighboring students.

(Adapted from Gilbert & Gay, 1985)

## SECTION TWO: CURRICULUM STRATEGIES

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## CURRICULUM TO DECREASE DISPROPORTIONALITY

1. Involve students with issues they regard as vital concerns.
2. Involve students with explanations of human differences.
3. Help students to see major concepts, big ideas, and general principles.

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4. Involve students in planning what they will be doing.
5. Involve students in real-life experiences.
6. Involve students in accessing information with technology.
7. Involve students in an active manner.
8. Ask students to think about ideas in a way that questions common sense or a widely accepted assumption.
9. Involve students in redoing, polishing, or perfecting their work.
10. Involve students in reflecting on their own lives and how they have come to believe and feel as they do.

(Adapted from Haberman, 1991).

## DESIGNING CURRICULUM FOR CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When designing curriculum to address cultural difference among students, there are several factors to consider. African-Americans, Arab-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Native-Americans, Laotian, and Cambodian Hmong Students:

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1. Tend to respond to things in terms of the "whole" picture instead of the parts.
2. Tend to prefer inferential reasoning to deductive or inductive reasoning.
3. Tend to approximate space, numbers and time rather than stick to accuracy.
4. Tend to prefer to focus on people and their activities rather than on things.
5. Tend to take helping professions or jobs.
6. Have a keen sense of justice and are quick to analyze and perceive injustice.
7. Tend to lean toward altruism, a concern for one's fellow man.
8. Tend to prefer novelty, freedom and personal distinction (i.e., music, sound, clothes).
9. Tend to be proficient in nonverbal communication.
10. In general, tend not to be "word dependent."

### SECTION THREE: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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## INSTRUCTION OF THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT

- Spontaneity ⇒ experiential learning
- Interaction ⇒ active vs. passive learning
- Socio-centric ⇒ peers as co-educators
- Creativity ⇒ acceleration not remediation
- Adaptability ⇒ problem-solving activities
- Predictability ⇒ structure and routine
- Trendsetters ⇒ opportunities for guided leadership
- Engagement ⇒ contributors to learning process
- Continuity ⇒ home-school-community

(Adapted from Bacon, 1990)

## APPROPRIATE INSTRUCTION

A three step process built on the foundation of individualized instruction and adapting to the learning styles of students.

Step 1: Identify the particular student trait that may require some change in instructional approach.

Any behavior that regularly occurs during instruction that seems odd, counterproductive, or disruptive should be pondered.

Step 2: Ask yourself whether this trait has implications for the (a) content/material taught, (b) context or physical setting for instruction, (c) mode or manner of instruction.

One or more of these aspects of teaching may have to be changed to assure culturally appropriate instruction.

Step 3: Define and implement the new instructional modification(s).

For example, teachers of students with an active, participatory style of learning would be well advised to incorporate more group activities, discussion, spontaneity, audience participation, performance, and movement into their lessons.

(Adapted from McIntyre, 1996)

## **THE FIVE R's IN INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING**

The Five R's are behaviors or learning principles which are important to the culturally different student's success in school.

The ability to teach pupils how to learn may make the difference in their experiencing success or failure in environments which may be alien to their natural style or cultural background.

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### **ROUTINE: Providing a Framework**

- Design a format for instructional presentation which is familiar, predictable, flexible, and adaptable to the diversity of subject matter presentations

### **RITUAL: Facilitating an Emotional Connection**

- Identify ways to increase student motivation about topic presented
- Allow ways for them to contribute to variation in rituals

### **RELEVANCE: Finding a Connection with the Real World**

- Establish some relationship to what they know/experience
- Demonstrate/illustrate future or present usefulness of information
- Use things familiar to them in their environment

### **RIGOR: Establishing the Necessity of Hard Work**

- Emphasize the need to stretch oneself-doing one's "personal best"
- Strong emphasis on reading, writing skills and the demonstration of competence in a variety of ways

### **RESPONSIBILITY: Structuring Intra-group Interaction**

- Facilitate cooperation in the academic process

- Emphasize value of pupils' different skills to foster interdependence
- Assign activities that require group work, which facilitates intra-group cooperation and intergroup cooperation

(Adapted from Bacon, 1990)

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## Grouping Ethnic Minority Children

Ethnic minority children are frequently identified as low-achievers. Knapp, Turnbull, and Shields (1990) found that several common arrangements for instructing diverse groups place low-achieving children together and separate them from those who do better. The following types of groups should be avoided:

- 1) Ability-based reading groups in the primary grades
- 2) Formal or informal tracking in literacy and mathematics instruction in the upper elementary grades
- 3) Group-based supplemental in both literacy and mathematics

Such grouping can perpetuate disproportionality. Rather than remediate students' deficits, students at risk of school failure must be accelerated and given the kind of high-expectations curriculum typical of programs for the gifted and talented.

(Adapted from Fashola & Slavin, 1998)



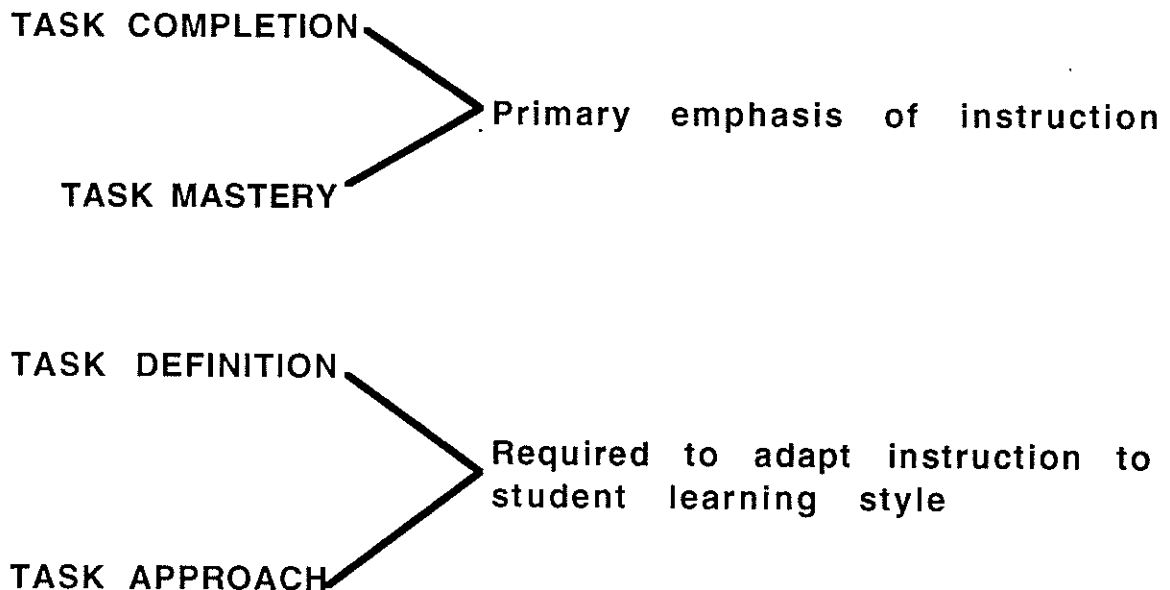
## SECTION FOUR: ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

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## ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT THINKING STYLES

Most often the instructional program focuses only on the actual performance of the student without much attention given to the strategies each individual uses to reach the final outcome. Sometimes, the "How?" is more important than the "What?" and taking the time to assess the reasons for failure can provide significant clues to direct the instruction of each individual or an entire group.



### LEARNING HOW TO LEARN

### SURVIVAL SKILLS FOR THE CULTURALLY DIFFERENT

(Adapted from Bacon, 1990)

## ASSESSING BLACK STUDENTS

Common Assessment in  
Urban School Districts  
K-5

Assessments Most  
Effective With  
Black Students K-5

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Written

Verbal

Utilitarian

Aesthetic

Sedentary Performance

Behaviorally Active

Competitive

Cooperative

Individual

Communal

Highly Structured

Self-Paced

Rigidly Timed Arrangements

Flexible Work

## SECTION FIVE: SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT STRATEGIES

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## SCHOOLWIDE MODELS

(1) Curriculum and instruction: The most important set of interventions are those that affect what happens between children and teachers everyday. Improving the quality of classroom instruction is the best and most cost-effective means of improving overall student achievement and preventing at-risk students from falling behind.

(2) Programs for at-risk students: Even with the best of instruction, some number of students in any school will always experience academic difficulties. In general, the best approaches to helping struggling students catch up with their peers involve one-to-one assistance targeted to the unique needs of the student. Most effective are tutoring programs involving certified teachers. However, tutoring approaches using paraprofessionals, volunteers, and cross-age peer tutors can also be effective. In each case, tutoring and other support services are likely to work best if they are closely linked to classroom instruction, using the same materials and objectives but adapting teaching methods to students' needs.

(3) Family Support: Any comprehensive schoolwide reform approach should include elements designed both to engage parents in supporting their children's success in school and to solve non-academic problems that could interfere with children's school performance.

(Adapted from Fashola and Slavin, 1998)

## PREVENTIONS

The following are ideas, strategies, and programs to help address student academic problems through effective use of preventative measures:

- a) Expand pre-school programs to more schools.
- b) Increase parent participation. An example would be the three levels of parent participation in the Comer Schools model:
  - Level 1- Broad participation and general support (ask about day's activities, supervise homework).
  - Level 2- Active daily participation in schools (volunteering, PTSA member).
  - Level 3- Participates in management of school (attend board meetings, on school team, recruiter).
- c) Teach parents how to initiate contact with teacher and school and become active participants in their child's program.
- d) Provide the parent training workshop "Preparing Your Kids For School."
- e) Provide ESL parent classes focusing on ways to increase family involvement in school.
- f) Identify and increase the number of staff who work directly with families.
- g) Provide increased staff development opportunities.
- h) Establish a "diverse" resource bank for schools to tap into services.
- l) Provide an orientation process for new families to schools.

j) Find examples of teachers who are making a difference, support them, publicize them and use them as models.

(Adapted from Ackerman, 1996)

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## INTERVENTIONS

The following are recommended as baseline funded services and activities for schools and students to support academic success:

- a) Incorporate "Reading Recovery" curriculum into classroom instructional program.
- b) Incorporate writing/language instructional materials and activities into the classroom program that help develop writing and editing abilities.
- c) Incorporate study skill and test-taking skill programs into the classroom.
- d) Provide paid tutors to work with at-risk students one-on-one.
- e) Identify and make use of "effective parenting" training opportunities and resources.
- f) Increase staff development for teachers around instructional strategies, cultural issues, diversity, and communication abilities.
- g) Increase school and staff accountability for meeting needs of at-risk students.
- h) Provide district sponsored, multi-lingual, "homework line" for students and parents.
- i) Provide an expanded school-day program for students in need of additional help.
- j) Provide a Saturday school program for "high-risk" students.
- k) Provide a summer school program to assist "high-risk" students.

(Adapted from Ackerman, 1996)



## THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

- Provide enrichment programs, field trips and assemblies to all students regardless of program or behavioral history.
- Provide after-school additional learning support (examples include study clubs, tutoring centers and homework centers, homework hotline).
- Provide additional motivational support (examples include academic eligibility to participate in Double Dutch, sports, learning contracts with rewards/incentives).
- Provide inclusion or blended models to include Special Education, Bilingual, Spectrum or Title 1 students in regular programs.
- Provide a variety of multi-age instructional groupings or classrooms where the focus is on the individual child.
- Develop school-wide culturally sensitive and relevant curricular activities to promote self-esteem.
- Eliminate tracking or labeling students.
- Reduce class size through use of specialists to teach for blocks of time.
- Provide time for teaming at grade levels to improve curriculum and instruction.
- Establish regular staff meeting discussions about the elimination of disproportionality as a priority goal for the school.
- Direct Student Intervention Team or Child Study Team to closely examine every student working significantly below grade level.

(Adapted from Ackerman, 1996)

**SECTION SIX: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## **OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN**

Professional Development in the following Opportunity To Learn topics can increase academic achievement for all students.

### **Content Coverage**

Content coverage has to do with whether or not students cover the core curriculum for their grade level or a particular subject area. When applied to assessment, content refers to the match between the content of the curriculum that was taught and the content of the test. Was there adequate and timely instruction of specific content and skills prior to students' taking a test? In many instances when comparative test scores were used to judge student achievement, the items on the test did not match the curriculum that was taught.

### **Content Exposure**

Content exposure concerns the time allotted for students to learn subject matter and the depth of teaching. The more time students spend on instructional experiences, the more they learn. This component of opportunity to learn involves time spent reviewing, practicing, or applying a particular concept or the depth of content covered with particular groups of students.

### **Content Emphasis**

Content emphasis determines which topics within the curriculum receive prominent attention and which students receive instruction

in low or higher order skills. Teachers choose what to emphasize in their classrooms according to personal experience, personal proficiency in a topic, perception of certain topics as more important than others, professional experiences, past education courses, textbooks, and other authorities. Teachers also select which skills to teach and which skills to emphasize with which groups of students.

### **Quality of Instructional Experience**

Quality of instructional experience reveals how teaching practices in the classroom, particularly the coherent presentation of lessons, have an impact on student academic achievement. Quality instruction occurs when teachers have cognitive command of the subject matter, structure new information for students logically, help them relate it to what they already know, monitor their performance, and provide corrective feedback during lessons. Teachers also need to explain how different parts of a lesson relate to one another.

(Adapted from Stevens, 1995)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for professional development program planning to improve academic achievement for all students and eliminate disproportionality in areas of low academic achievement.

- Initiate a professional development plan rotating over a three (3) year span.
- Provide administrative trainings that include, but are not limited to:
  1. Working effectively with bilingual students.
  2. Understanding critical body language (cultural differences).
  3. Developing cross-cultural communication skills.
  4. Developing full potential of children from all cultures.
  5. Developing socio-cultural interaction skills.
  6. Eliminating racial bias of all races.
  7. Developing alternatives to punishments and negative consequences.
  8. Conducting an effective and useful teacher evaluation process.
  9. Developing an awareness of disproportionality issues within the district.
  10. Developing multicultural learning and teaching strategies.

- Increase the teaching skills of all classroom staff in a consistent and effective manner by including training in the following three (3) areas:

### **1. Teaching strategies**

- a) Provide staff training and activities to increase understanding of diverse learning styles of various cultural groups.
- b.) Provide staff opportunities to develop a variety of teaching styles.
- c) Implement cooperative Learning strategies.
- d) Identify ways to eliminate disproportionality in the classroom.
- e) Identify ways to develop full potential for every student.
- f) Acquire increased technical skills to support content area instruction.
- g) Gain awareness of how high student expectations can increase achievement.
- h) Increase strategies for involving parents/guardians in the classroom.
- i) Provide training in cross-cultural communication skills.
- j) Increase abilities to work more effectively with bilingual students and parents.

## **2. Multicultural/multi-lingual education**

- a) Provide staff an in-depth training on Black, Chicano/Latino, Native American, South Pacific and the numerous Asian cultures.
  - b) Develop skills for working effectively with bilingual students and families.
- 

## **3. Classroom Management**

- a) Develop skills in the use of Positive Discipline techniques.
- b) Develop skills in the area of proactive classroom management.
- c) Develop alternative procedures to punishments and negative consequences.
- d) Increase skills/knowledge in the area of conflict management.
- e) Increase awareness of discipline as it reflects on culturally diverse populations.
- f) Increase skills/knowledge in the area of anger management.

(Adapted from Ackerman, 1996)

**SECTION SEVEN: RELATIONSHIPS**

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## IMPROVING STAFF AND STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

### The Classroom Environment:

- Establish clear classroom expectations of student behavior
- Establish a clear set of routines, structure and procedures in the classroom, so students are not "set up" for behavioral failure.
- Address problems while they are small, before the problem becomes larger. Communicate with other teachers, parents and students throughout the problem-solving process.
- Utilize published programs which build mutual respect and positive relationships with students such as:
  - Discipline with Dignity (K-12)
  - The Solution Book, by Randy Sprick
  - Second Step curriculum
- Develop individualized behavior plans or IEP's when needed.
- Train all students in conflict mediation.
- Have students self-evaluate behavior.
- Establish positive relationships first; contact parents before there is a behavior referral.
- Develop "Help Groups" for teachers to share effective strategies for dealing with disruptive behavior.
- Work out an agreement with the teachers to send the student to another room, as an alternative to the hallway or office.

## **The School Environment**

- Develop school-wide expectations of student behavior.
  - Develop school-wide reinforcements and recognition to support social and academic standards and achievement.
  - Develop and establish a common conflict resolution strategy used by all staff.
- 
- Train and use student conflict managers on the playground.
  - Establish anger management groups with counselor.
  - Establish student-centered activities and clubs which promote involvement and connection of the student to the school in non-academic ways.
  - Establish clear and immediate communication with parents, with an emphasis on students learning problem-solving skills.
  - Develop a school-wide Staff Code of Conduct.
  - Establish an in-house suspension program.

(Adapted from Ackerman, 1996)

## **RELATIONS BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES**

### **Assumptions Whites Make Which Facilitate Authentic Relations:**

- People count as individuals.
- Blacks are human with individual feelings, aspirations and attitudes.
- Blacks have a heritage of which they are proud.
- Interdependence is needed between Whites and blacks
- Blacks are angry.
- Whites cannot fully understand what it means to be Black.
- Whiteness/Blackness is a real difference but not the basis on which to determine behavior.
- Most Blacks can handle Whites' authentic behavior and feelings.
- Blacks want a responsible society.
- Blacks are capable of managerial maturity.
- I may be part of the problem.

### **Assumptions Blacks Make Which Facilitate Authentic Relations:**

- Openness is healthy.
- Interdependence is needed between Blacks and Whites.
- People count as individuals.
- Negotiation and collaboration are possible strategies
- Whites are human beings and, whether they should or not, do have their own hang-ups.
- Some Whites can help and "do their own thing."
- Some Whites have "soul."

### **Behaviors of Whites Which Facilitate Authentic Relations:**

- Directness and openness in expressing feelings.
- Assisting other Whites to understand and confront feelings.
- Supporting self-initiated moves of Black people.
- Listening without interrupting.

- Demonstration of interest in learning about Black perceptions, culture, etc.
- Staying with and working through difficult confrontations.
- Taking a risk; being first to confront the differences.
- Assuming responsibility for examining own motives and where they are.

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**Behaviors of Blacks Which Facilitate Authentic Relations:**

- Showing interest in understanding the White point of view.
- Acknowledging that there are some committed Whites.
- Acting as if "we have some power" and don't need to prove it.
- Allowing Whites to experience unaware areas of racism.
- Openness.
- Expression of real feelings.
- Dealing with Whites where they are.
- Meeting Whites half-way.
- Treating Whites on a one-to-one basis.
- Telling it like it is.
- Realistic goal-sharing.
- Showing pride in their heritage.

## SECTION EIGHT: RESOURCES

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## SUGGESTED READING LIST

Black Children: Their Roots, Culture And Learning Styles,

Hale Benson, Janice

A more complete and scholarly work than, From Rage to Hope.

Careful discussion of cultural strengths and differences.

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The Conspiracy To Destroy Black Boys, Kunjufu, Jawanza

A hard look at the "system" that continues to fail young black boys.

Describes the critical 4th grade crisis that ends their academic careers.

Crossings, Harrington, Walt

A great read. A white journalist tours America in search of a broad description of "the Black experience." he interviews an amazingly diverse representation of Black America. Their shared experience is amazing.

The Dream Keepers, Billings, Glory

Great book. Ten case studies of teachers who have been successful over the long term with African American kids.

From Rage To Hope: Strategies For Reclaiming Black And Hispanic Students, Kuykendall, Crystal

Good overview of Black learning styles and issues of expectations, creating good schools, parent involvement and discipline.

Issues In African American Education, Gill, Walter

Looks at systemic issues which keep African Americans from succeeding.

A New Look At Black Families, Willie, Charles

Black And White Families, Willie, Charles

Both books look at Black families, case study style. Compares Black and White family cultures.

Other People's Children, Delpit, Lisa

Great series of articles describing cultural differences as they relate to cognitive development in American schools.

The Promise Land, Lemann, Nicholas

Chronicles the great migration of Blacks from the south to the cities of the north. Great descriptions of the share cropping system that existed in the south until the 50's, the disillusionment with integration in the north, and failure of the great society to make dreams come true.

Rumors Of Inferiority, Howard, Jeff

Great article that is the cornerstone of all of his work. A must read.

White Teacher, Paley, Vivian

A kindergarten teacher shares her learning as she first works with African American children. An easy read with great insights into feeling and prejudice.

(Adapted from Ackerman, 1996)

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## REFERENCE MATERIALS AND TEXTBOOKS

### Integrated Instruction

Answers About Questions: Teacher's Resource Guide on the Use of Questioning to Promote Thinking Skills, Publisher: Seattle Public Schools

Jr. Great Books, Publisher: The Great Books Foundation Chicago, IL  
Oregon Direct Writing Assessment, Publisher/Source: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Private Eye- Looking/Thinking by Analogy, Ruef, Kerry & Assoc.  
Writer's Express: Handbook For Young Writers, Thinkers, & Learners, Kemper, Dave / Write Source (Grades 3-5)

### Classroom Management/Behavior and Social Skills

Discipline With Dignity, Curwin, Richard L. / ASCD

Gender Expectations & Student Achievement (GESA), Graysore, Dolores & Dahlberg Martin, Mary / Los Angeles, City Office of Education

Please Understand Me ?!, Keirse, David / Prometheus Nemesis  
Second Step Curriculum, Beland, Kathy M.Ed. / Committee For Children

Skillstreaming In Early Childhood, McGinnis, Ellen / Research Press  
The Solution Book, Sprick, Randy

(Adapted from Ackerman, 1996)

## **"EFFECTIVE PARENTING" TRAINING AND RESOURCES**

In the Greater Seattle Area:

### **Parenting Curriculum**

- Active Parenting (800)-825-0060
- Apple Parenting Program
  - Highline/West Seattle Mental Health (206) 241-0990
  - Renton Technical College (206) 235-2470
- Center For Improvement of Child Caring (CICC)  
(818)-980-0903
  - Effective Black Parenting
  - Los Ninos Bien Educados Program
- Parents and Children Videotape Series (206) 285-2560
- Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (S.T.E.P.)  
(800)-328-2560

### **Agencies Providing Parenting Support**

- Asian Counseling and Referral Service (206) 461-3606
  - 18 Asian languages and dialects, plus French & English
- Atlantic Street Center (206) 329-2050
- Catholic Community Services (206) 323-6336
- Center for Career Alternatives (206) 322-9080
- Central Area Mental Health Center (206) 723-1980
- Central Youth and Family Services (206) 322-7676
- Children's Home Society (206) 524-6020

- Children's Hospital and Medical Center (206) 526-2000
  - Consejo Counseling and Referral Service (206) 461-4680
  - Family Reconciliation Services (DSHS) (206) 721-4115
  - Group Health Cooperative (206) 287-2500
  - Highline/West Seattle Mental Health (206) 241-0990
  - Mental Health North (206) 461-4544
- 
- Northwest Youth and Family Services (206) 527-1405
  - Odessa Brown Children's Clinic (206) 329-7870
  - Parent Place (206) 364-9933
  - Refugee Women's Alliance (206) 721-0243
  - Seattle Mental Health (206) 324-2400
  - Seattle Samoan Center (206) 722-0968

#### **Family Centers**

- Garfield Family Center (206) 461-4486
- North Seattle Family Center (206) 364-7930
- Rainier Vista Family Center (206) 725-2041
- Southeast Family Center (206) 723-1301
- Southwest Family Center (206) 763-7929

#### **Parent Information Line**

- Parent Information Line (206) 233-0139

(Adapted from Ackerman, 1996)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

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The purpose of this study was to develop a resource guide for teacher use to address issues of disproportionality in grades K-5 in urban school districts. To accomplish this purpose, a review of literature and current research on disproportionality in academic achievement in urban public schools was conducted. This review focused on effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices as they related to disproportionality in grades K-5. Additionally, information from selected urban school districts with disproportionality was obtained and analyzed.

#### Conclusions

Conclusions reached as a result of this project were:

1. Disproportionality is a crucial issue in urban school districts and effects society as a whole.

2. The academic achievement gap between ethnic minority children and white children may be reduced through curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices (K-5) that have been found to be effective in urban school districts.
3. A resource guide to assist teachers in addressing issues of disproportionality in urban school districts may benefit all students.

### Recommendations

As a result of this project, the following recommendations have been suggested:

1. The crucial issues of disproportionality including the academic achievement gap, should be addressed in teacher preparation courses.
2. Urban school districts should have a written plan for addressing the academic achievement gap between ethnic minority children and white children.

3. Educators in urban school districts should be trained in effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment strategies that have been found to reduce or eliminate disproportionality.
4. Teachers of K-5 students in urban school districts, addressing issues of disproportionality, may wish to adopt or utilize the resource guide developed for this project, or undertake further research on this topic to eliminate disproportionality in urban school districts.

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