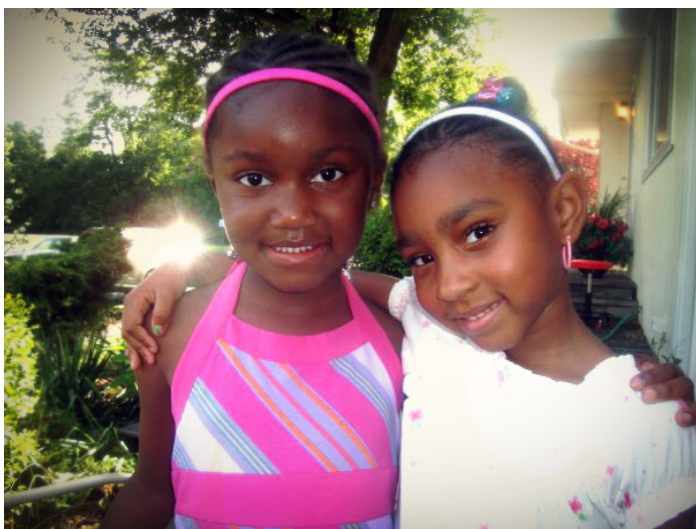


## The Causes of Underrepresentation of African American Children in Gifted Programs and the Need to Address this Problem through More Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices in Teacher Education Programs

Barbara J. Frye and Helen A. Vogt

*“Of all the civil rights for which the world has struggled and fought for 5,000 years, the right to learn is undoubtedly the most fundamental... The freedom to learn... has been bought by bitter sacrifice. And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but what we do not believe; not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and the leaders of other centuries have said. We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be.” – W.E.B. DuBois*



The research clearly indicates that, despite well documented facts about inequities in the education of African American students over the past several decades coupled with pleas for educational reform, African Americans continue to have disproportionately high rates of dropout, high representation in special education, low representation in gifted programs, and high rates of poor academic performance.<sup>1</sup> How can these conditions continue when we know that we are not meeting the needs of so many students? Unfortunately, there is not just one simple answer to this question, or to the question of why African

American students are so underrepresented in advanced or gifted programs. As a teacher educator and the director of a teacher preparation program, it is my responsibility to explore this issue in order to adjust teacher preparation, not only to ensure that our pre-service teachers understand the disparities that exist in the education of African Americans and other disenfranchised groups, but also to arm them with the necessary skills and strategies to meet the needs of all children. This paper will focus on the underrepresentation of African American children in gifted and advanced programs, the probable reasons for this inequity, and possible solutions through teacher preparation in culturally responsive pedagogy.

Currently, although African American children make up approximately 16% of the students in U.S. public schools, they only make up 8.4% of students in gifted programs, a statistic that has not improved in the last decade.<sup>2</sup> In some areas, the gifted enrollment for African American students has actually declined. In New York City, for example, there was a 6% drop in the number of African American students identified for gifted programs from 2007 to 2008.<sup>3</sup> This may be in part because, in an effort to close the achievement gap between European American and African American students, most of the resources and energy have been dedicated to addressing the needs of African American children who are not meeting specific academic requirements. African American children who excel in school have been underserved and neglected due to this focus on closing the achievement gap, in combination with “probable systemic and cultural biases due to negative stereotypes about African American children’s academic and intellectual functioning.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to negative stereotypes, teacher attitudes, lack of referrals of African American students to gifted education programs, and culturally biased tests are also reasons for this terrible inequity. Furthermore, African American students are half as likely as white students to be placed in Honors or Advanced Placement (AP) English or math classes, and 2.4 times more likely than white students to be placed in remedial classes.<sup>5</sup> This puts African American students at a disadvantage in terms of college preparedness.

Another issue that cannot be ignored is the difficulty of sustaining African American children in gifted or higher-level programs. In many instances, when African American children enter a gifted program, they do not see anyone who looks like them or to whom they can relate. Without a very supportive environment with teachers, counselors, and administrators who understand the importance of helping gifted African American students with identity

development, the likelihood that a gifted African American child will succeed is greatly diminished. It has been shown that African American gifted students experience more emotional and psychological problems than their non-gifted counterparts. The need to belong and peer allegiance often take precedence in the lives of students of color. African American students who feel unconnected or unaccepted by their peers may become withdrawn, introverted, aggressive, or disruptive. They often choose to underachieve rather than risk being accused by their peers of “acting white.”<sup>6</sup> This negative attitude of their African American peers outside gifted programs can have a profoundly adverse effect on the self-efficacy levels of these advanced children during a time in their lives when their identities are still forming. It has even been documented that African American students who drop out of school have significantly higher IQ levels but lower academic goals than those who remain in school.<sup>6</sup> While much research has investigated the underperformance of African American children and the influencing factors, little research has been focused on high-achieving African American students. Future research needs to investigate both the barriers and the factors that are conducive to the academic success of gifted African American students.<sup>7</sup>

Colleges of education have a responsibility to prepare teachers, counselors, and academic leaders with the cultural competencies necessary to identify high-achieving African American children and to guide and mentor them as they develop their identities as scholars. Culturally responsive or relevant teaching pedagogy has become the focus of the College of Education at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. In fact, we have trademarked the term Culturally Responsive Teaching, Leadership, and Counseling™ (CRTLC™), and are making a concerted effort to infuse the principles of cultural responsiveness into all of our classes. Culturally Responsive Teaching, as defined by Barnes, facilitates and supports the achievement of all students. It requires teachers to create a learning environment where students are welcomed, supported, and provided with the best opportunities to learn regardless of cultural and linguistic background.<sup>8</sup> Dixon and Fasching-Varner describe culturally responsive pedagogy as based on three basic ideas:

- **Academic Achievement:** includes but is not limited to measures of achievement and is focused on teaching and learning rather than discipline.

- **Sociopolitical Awareness:** presumes knowledge is constructed and used toward eradication of injustice. The role of teacher and learner is never neutral but situated socio-culturally, socio-historically, and socio-politically.
- **Cultural Competence:** suggests that teachers understand that they, and their students, are cultural beings. The teacher appreciates and understands students’ cultures and uses them as the basis upon which [the] teaching and learning process is premised.<sup>9</sup>

Teachers cannot “learn” culturally responsive pedagogy as one learns information or teaching strategies. Cultural responsiveness is dispositional, attitudinal, and political.<sup>10</sup> Teacher preparation programs must carefully select teacher candidates who have the dispositional qualities that will allow them to see the potential in every child regardless of race, ethnicity, language, gender, etc. After carefully selecting teacher candidates, the program must challenge teacher candidates’ beliefs and provide them with knowledge about inequities and injustices that exist in our educational system. Finally, the construct of culturally responsive pedagogy must be woven around and within all teaching methodologies and strategies, and teacher candidates must develop what Geneva Gay refers to as cultural competence—the ability to use the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of students who are ethnically diverse as conduits for teaching them more effectively.<sup>11</sup>

While the number of African American children identified for gifted and advanced programs is deplorable and the task of remedying this situation daunting, developing teachers with a commitment to social justice and culturally responsive teaching is a step in the right direction. My colleagues and I, as teacher educators, have little influence on the identification process for gifted programs and advanced classes in the neighboring school systems. We can, however, educate our pre-service teachers about this inequity and help them develop the skills necessary to identify gifted African American students with measures other than culturally biased tests. Additionally, we can teach pre-service teachers the importance of supporting and mentoring these students as they develop their academic identities. Following the Notes is a guide for planning lessons.

## Notes

1. Gwendolyn Cartledge, Julie Sentelle, Scott Loe, M. Charles Lambert, and Evette Simmons Reed, "To Be Young, Gifted, and African American?: A Case Study of Positive Interventions Within An Inner-City Classroom of African American Students," *Journal of Negro Education* 70, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 243-254.
2. Jim Horn, "NYC's Incredible Shrinking Diversity in Gifted Programs," June 20, 2008, <http://www.schoolsmatter.info/2008/06/nycs-incredible-shrinking-diversity-in.html> (accessed December 7, 2009).  
  
Donna Y. Ford and J. John Harris III, "Perceptions and Attitudes of Black Students toward School, Achievement, and Other Educational Variables," *Child Development* 67, no. 3 (June 1996): 1141-1152.
3. Jim Horn, "NYC's Incredible Shrinking Diversity in Gifted Programs," June 20, 2008, <http://www.schoolsmatter.info/2008/06/nycs-incredible-shrinking-diversity-in.html> (accessed December 7, 2009).
4. Dorothy M. Singleton, Jonathan Livingston, Dorothy Hines, and Helen Jones, "Under-Representation of African American Students in Education Programs: Implications for Sustainability in Gifted Classes," *Perspectives*, Spring 2008: 11-21.
5. Donna Y. Ford and J. John Harris III, "Perceptions and Attitudes of Black Students toward School, Achievement, and Other Educational Variables," *Child Development* 67, no. 3 (June 1996): 1141-1152.
6. Donna Y. Ford and J. John Harris III, "Perceptions and Attitudes of Black Students toward School, Achievement, and Other Educational Variables," *Child Development* 67, no. 3 (June 1996): 1141-1152; Dorothy M. Singleton, Jonathan Livingston, Dorothy Hines, and Helen Jones, "Under-Representation of African American Students in Education Programs: Implications for Sustainability in Gifted Classes," *Perspectives*, Spring 2008: 11-21.
7. Dorothy M. Singleton, Jonathan Livingston, Dorothy Hines, and Helen Jones, "Under-Representation of African American Students in Education Programs: Implications for Sustainability in Gifted Classes," *Perspectives*, Spring 2008: 11-21.
8. Charline J. Barnes, "Preparing Preservice Teachers to Teach in a Culturally Responsive Way," *The Negro Educational Review* 47, no. 1 (April 2006): 85-100.
9. Felicia Dixon and Kenneth James Fasching-Varner.
10. Felicia Dixon and Kenneth James Fasching-Varner.
11. Geneva Gay, "Culturally Responsive Teaching in Special Education for Ethnically Diverse Students: Setting the Stage," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 15, no. 6 (November 2002): 613-629.

For additional resources, see ASALH's bookshelf at <http://www.asalh.net/bookshelf.html>



**Barbara J. Frye, Ph.D.**, is an assistant professor in literacy education and the director of the Teacher Education Licensure Program at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

**Email:** [bfrye@uccs.edu](mailto:bfrye@uccs.edu)



**Helen (Ara) Vogt** received a B.A. from Colorado State University with a major in French and a minor in Zoology. She has begun her graduate studies and licensure program at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and hopes to teach biology and French at the secondary level.

## Lesson Plan

### How to Design Culturally Responsive Lesson Plans: A Guide for Pre-Service Teachers

Barbara J. Frye

#### Connections to Teacher Preparation

Due to the underrepresentation of the historical achievements of African Americans within the current educational system, it is necessary for pre-service teachers to understand the principles underpinning culturally responsive pedagogy and understand how to develop a classroom environment and construct lessons that are sensitive and responsive to children who come from diverse cultures.

#### Goals of the Lesson

Pre-service teachers will learn how to develop culturally responsive lesson plans by incorporating standards, textbooks, and other ancillary materials such as *The Mis-Education of the Negro* by Dr. Carter G. Woodson and the *Study Guide to The Mis-Education of the Negro* (available online at [http://www.asalh.org/files/Miseducation\\_Study\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.asalh.org/files/Miseducation_Study_Guide.pdf)). The authors of the study guide, Spencer et al., seek to keep the lessons of Carter G. Woodson's seminal book alive and relevant for 21<sup>st</sup>-century educators. The authors state that one of Woodson's underlying themes is "If you distort a people's history, you will eventually distort a people's future." They believe that Woodson's message can help to remedy cultural inequities today, including "impoverished Black communities, inadequate schools, and poor job opportunities." The authors challenge educators to form an appropriate response to these issues in their teaching in order to ensure that African American students are fairly represented at all levels of education by utilizing culturally responsive pedagogy within all teaching methodologies and strategies.

#### Objective

Pre-service teachers will select a lesson that they have already prepared or create a new lesson. They will then use the following criteria to analyze, revise, or create their lesson to ensure it is based on culturally responsive pedagogical principles.

#### National Council for Social Studies (NCSS) Standards

##### Culture and Cultural Diversity

- Assist learners to understand and apply the concept of culture as an integrated whole that governs the functions and interaction of language, literature, arts, traditions, beliefs, values, and behavior patterns.
- Enable learners to analyze and explain how groups, societies, and cultures address human needs and concerns
- Have learners interpret patterns of behavior as reflecting values and attitudes, which contribute to or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding.

## History

- Guide learners in acquiring knowledge of the history and values of diverse civilizations throughout the world including those of the West, and in comparing patterns of continuity and change in different parts of the world.

### Foundations of Education

- Read *The Mis-Education of the Negro*
- Read the *Study Guide to the Mis-Education of the Negro*

## Chapter Summaries from the Study Guide to the Mis-Education of the Negro

### Chapter 3 – How We Drifted Away from the Truth

**Chapter Summary:** Woodson argues that whether in science, history, or literature, Whites have been taught that their cultural contributions to American society were superior to those of Blacks. This type of teaching, he believes, has built “in Whites a race hate of the Negro, and in the Negroes contempt for themselves.” This is one of the main themes of Woodson’s book: If you distort a people’s history, you will eventually distort a people’s future. The perpetuation of inaccuracies in the historical record, which elevated European culture and denigrated that of Africans, was a grave injustice in Woodson’s view.

### Chapter 4 – Education under Outside Control

**Chapter Summary:** There is a direct link between the type of education and training you receive and your future work or career. Your ability to make a living, care for a family, and contribute to your community are all heavily determined by the educational opportunities made available to you, and how well you make use of these opportunities. In this chapter, Woodson considers deeply the plight of Black America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Some 50 to 75 years out from slavery, Woodson was frustrated by the lack of progress of most African Americans. A major factor causing the stagnation, he argues, was that Whites, who did not truly understand African Americans’ best interests, were educating most African Americans. The Negro, Woodson writes, “will never be able to show off his originality as long as his efforts are directed from without by those who socially proscribe him. Such ‘friends’ will unconsciously keep him in the ghetto.” As you explore this chapter, consider the connections of Woodson’s argument to the state of public education today and the effect that Woodson’s prescription might have on this.

### Chapter 10 – The Loss of Vision

**Chapter Summary:** Dr. Woodson emphasizes that there was a loss of vision. This loss of vision was due to African Americans not thinking for themselves. Dr. Woodson provides an example of this when he discusses some highly educated individuals. “Denied participation in the higher things of life, the ‘educated’ Negro himself joins, too, with ill designing persons to handicap his people by systematized exploitation.” Dr. Woodson also discusses this loss of vision in terms of the lack of confidence. Dr. Woodson declared that “the lack of confidence of the Negro in himself and in his possibilities is what has kept him down.” Dr. Woodson emphasizes that until the Negro employs new ways of “thinking,” there will be no change in his condition, and he will always remain oppressed.

### Chapter 13 – Understand the Negro

**Chapter Summary:** Dr. Woodson emphasizes the value of learning about Black history. He discusses how this history has not been taught, but European history has been promoted. When Woodson asked Black college administrators, they responded, “‘We do not offer here any course in Negro history, Negro literature, or race relations,’ recently said a professor of a Negro college. ‘We study the Negro along with other people.’” However, Woodson believed, “No one can be thoroughly educated until he learns as much about the Negro as he knows about other people.” Unfortunately, Woodson reported that “upon examining the recent catalogues of the leading Negro colleges, one finds that invariably they give courses in ancient, medieval, and modern Europe, but they do not give such courses in ancient, medieval, and modern Africa.”

## **Chapter 14 – The New Program**

**Chapter Summary:** Dr. Woodson describes a new program for the education of the Black American. The substance of Woodson's New Program centers around the study of Black life during the antebellum period. Ignorance of the antebellum era and the valuable cultural practices Africans brought with them from Africa must be addressed. These assumptions prevent current Black students from being equipped to handle the social problems of today. Woodson compares the aims of the New Program with the successful education of the Filipinos. The first "highly educated" Americans in the conquered Philippine Islands after the Spanish American War in 1898 tried to teach the Filipinos the same way and with the same material used to teach American children. This strategy met with failure. An insurance man, who had never been an educator, came up with a plan that worked. He realized that to teach the Filipinos, it was necessary to make the learning relevant to their daily lives. These children needed to be taught through the use of objects from their own culture. Using this strategy, Woodson suggests that the education of the Black American would emphasize Black American culture. The accomplishments of "American" heroes should not be ignored; but the accomplishments of Black Americans have to be given equal time, honor, and respect.

### **Prior to Lesson or Building Classroom Culture**

#### **Planning for the Appropriate Environment**

- The teacher is aware of the different cultures represented in the classroom, school, and community and understands their different ways of knowing, learning, and communicating.
- Visuals in the classroom represent diverse cultural groups (those that are representative of the classroom, school, and community and more).
- Learning centers and/or activities are designed to allow students to use different modalities/intelligences.
- Established and predictable daily schedules and routines are set and posted for students.
- Home-school connections are made among school, home, and the community.

### **During the Lesson**

#### **Planning for the Appropriate Interactional Styles**

- Grouping is carefully considered and roles/expectations are clearly explained or stated.
- All students have the opportunity to be engaged in the lesson at different levels and in different ways.
- Students are allowed to talk to and assist one another throughout the day.

#### **Planning for Instructional Strategies**

- The teacher has gone beyond the school curriculum to ensure that the information presented reflects more than the European American or white culture.
- Assignments are explained globally with step-by-step directions for what groups or individuals are expected to do or accomplish.
- Modeling and think-alouds are used, and there are ample opportunities for students to practice their learning before being asked to demonstrate competency and/or assessed.
- Information is conveyed verbally using many illustrations and/or models.

### **After the Lesson**

#### **Planning for Assessment**

- Both qualitative and quantitative data have been included in the assessment of individuals.
- Tests and assessments have been analyzed for cultural bias.
- Students are given choices in how they demonstrate their learning.

**Teacher Resources:**

1. Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (The ASALH Press, 2005).
2. *The Study Guide to The Mis-Education of the Negro* (available online at [http://www.asalh.org/files/Miseducation\\_Study\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.asalh.org/files/Miseducation_Study_Guide.pdf)).
3. James W. Loewen, *Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and Get Students Excited About Doing History* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2010)
4. Jacqueline Irvine, Beverly Armento, Virginia Causey, Joan Jones, Ramona Frasher, and Molly Weinburgh, *Culturally Responsive Lesson Plans for Elementary and Middle Grades: A Guide for Preservice Teachers* (McGraw-Hill, 2000).
5. A collection of curricular unit plans: <http://www.ithaca.edu/wise/topics/multicultural.htm>
6. NEA-Online Resources for Culturally Responsive Teachers, <http://www.nea.org/home/16723.htm>
7. Multicultural Education Internet Resource Guide. This guide to over 50 websites was created to assist multicultural educators in locating educational resources on the Internet. <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jar/Multi.html>
8. The Monarch Center—Program content that fosters culturally relevant pedagogy. <http://www.monarchcenter.org/resources/pedagogy.html>

