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Black Exceptionality in Academia: A Cultural-Historical Re-Conceptualization of Black Male Students Identified With Learning Disabilities in Higher Education

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Author note: The first two authors contributed equally to this article.



BLACK EXCEPTIONALITY IN ACADEMIA: A CULTURAL-HISTORICAL RE-CONCEPTUALIZATION OF BLACK MALE STUDENTS IDENTIFIED WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The underrepresentation of Black male students identified with learning disabilities (LD) in higher education is a symptom of a larger social injustice, the racialization of educational opportunities and outcomes in the United States. We provided a critical review of the literature to examine the structural and social barriers facing Black college students identified with LD in terms of access to adequate support services, refusal of funds of knowledge that Black students bring to higher education, and hegemonic organization of higher education. Following themes are explored: a) historical legacy of racial inequity in academia; b) systemic contradictions in institutional practices; c) absence of collaborative networks. This article offers a conceptualization of antiblackness and the denial of Black exceptionalism informed by Vygotskian cultural-historical activity theory and critical pedagogies. The concepts of cultural mediation, cultural hegemony, resistance, and agency will be used to examine the challenges and possibilities of scaffolding success and joy of Black males identified as LD in higher education.

Keywords: Black males, learning disabilities, higher education, cultural-historical activity theory, contradictions, cultural mediation, agency, participatory social justice

There has been considerable attention concerning the recruitment, retention, and success of Black students in higher education. Scholars have recently attempted to articulate the unique needs and experiences of Black male students (Amechi et al., 2015; Robinson, 2016). The enrollment of Black students in higher education has been slowly increasing but continues to lag behind that of their White counterparts. Black students between the ages of 18-24 years old accounted for 15% of the total undergraduate student enrollment in degree-granting institutions, whereas White students accounted for nearly four times that, representing 58% of the enrollment (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Of the total enrollment population of Black students, Black males represented only 38% of the population during this same time period (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Racial disparities in degree attainment are also evident. At the bachelor's degree level, 69% of the bachelor's degrees granted to U.S. citizens in 2013 were conferred to Whites and only 11% to Blacks (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). Looking at data disaggregated by disability status, continued growth in enrollment rates of Black collegians with disabilities is conspicuous. The 2011-12 enrollment rates of Black students with disabilities increased 2.3% from 9.9% in the 2007-08 academic year (Department of Education, 2016). However, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (Department of Education, 2011) revealed a dismal reality that 23% of Black college students with disabilities attending 4-year higher education institutions completed their program while about 43% of white students with disabilities in 4-year universities received diploma or certificate.

Despite the increased attention given to the experiences of Black students, relatively little research has explored the experiences of Black males with learning disabilities (LD) in higher education (Banks & Hughes, 2013; Davis & Palmer, 2010; Robinson, 2016). We argue that underrepresentation of Black male students with LD in higher education is one of the collateral damages of injustice in a racially stratified society (Du Bois, 1994; Tyack, 1974). We maintain a focus on Black males as a result of the deficit-oriented perspectives that regard Black men as a “problem” and the unimaginability of Black bodies and their diverse strengths, needs, and goals in higher education.

In this article, we provided a cultural-historical analysis of the structural and social factors influencing the learning and developmental opportunities and outcomes of Black male collegians with LD based on a critical review of the literature. A cultural-historical analysis is critical to understand the complex experiences of Black male students with LD in academia. We conceptualized “learning disability” as a socially and historically constructed disability category rather than a deficit solely inherent within individual students (Reid & Valle, 2004). The historical legacy of racial inequity and the contradictions prevalent in institutional practice serve aggression toward complex, dynamic, and multiple developmental possibilities of Black male students. Based on a Vygotskian cultural-historical activity theory, we envision positive, inclusive and responsive context for expansive learning for Black students with LD (Engeström, 2008; Gutiérrez, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). The concepts of cultural mediation, agency, resistance, and participatory justice will be used to examine the challenges while illuminating new possibilities for the joy and prosperity of Black students with LD in higher education.

Structural Contradictions

Nationally, students with LD in higher education encounter multiple structural and social barriers to obtaining disability support services and academic accommodations and negative attitudes (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; May & Stone, 2010). Underrepresentation of college students identified with LD in service identification is a manifestation of both structural and institutional obstacles. Regardless of variations in sociodemographic markers, collegians with LD face multiple challenges in postsecondary education. Academically, they suffer from heavy workloads without accommodations and relatively less recognition incommensurate with their efforts (Denhart, 2008). They are misunderstood by faculty and peers as inferior or not college material (Roer-Strier, 2002). College students with LD tend to be unwilling to disclose their disability due to the anxiety of being stigmatized even if proactive disability services extenuate academic difficulties (Lightner et al., 2012). Also, students with LD are less likely to obtain services due to poor transition planning (Cawthon & Cole, 2010).

Black male students with LD experience similar obstacles when they embark on their educational journeys in complicated and unfamiliar college systems. However, they have complex experience at the intersection of multiple differences such as race and disability (King, 1988). Different social markers of “Black,” “male,” and “learning disability” produce a “matrix of domination” in which Black male students with LD experience exclusion and oppression (Collins, 2000). Consequently, understanding experiences of Black male students with LD in academia requires disentangling the complex webs of development weaved by the interplay between multiple identity categories and oppressive education, legal, and economic systems.

In this section, we examine cultural-historical contexts in which ontological and epistemological ways of Black male students with and without LD become outlawed (Baker, 2002). Dehumanizing contexts of learning and development are ongoing and cumulative constructs emerged from combinations of multiple, historically accumulated contradictions.

Systemic contradictions manifest themselves as daily conflicts and bind. Simultaneously contradictions are driving forces or motives for systemic transformation (Engeström, 2008). Social injustice in resource distribution, monolithic construction of Black maleness, failing pedagogical practices to meet Black males' needs and interest, their marginalization in institutional decision-making are examined as manifestations of historically accumulated contradictions in the US education system (Bal, 2017).

The historical legacy of racial inequity. Experiences of Black male college students with LD are inseparable from the historical legacy of racism in the United States. Uneven distribution of economic resources, poor housing stability, failing health care, political marginalization, and racial profiling are cumulative and ongoing “historical debts” in a racially polarized US society (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Structured inequity in society has critical impacts on Black students' academic achievement and life outcomes. Racially based geographical segregation and resultant unequal access to resources threaten opportunity to learn (Jones, Harris & Tate, 2015). For example, de jure housing segregation forced Black students to live far away from the campus (Harper, Smith, & Davis III, 2016). Black youth are educated in underfunded and under-resourced schools with inexperienced or underqualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Black male students with LD are no exception. Quantitatively and qualitatively inadequate educators and under-resourced special education services hinder the progress for Black males with LD (Harry & Klingner, 2014).

Furthermore, hegemonic constructions of race and gender strongly influence experiences of Black male students with LD. Construction of Black maleness as a historical legacy of racism erodes opportunities of learning. The Black male body is constructed as “pathologized,” “criminalized,” and “in crisis” in public discourses (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). Multiplicities of Black male students are confined into what Howard (2014) described as dehumanizing images “physical brute, anti-intellectual, shiftless and lazy, hypersexual, criminal-minded, slickster-pimp, and gangster” (p. 31). Hegemonic and ideological arrangements privileging normative Whiteness relegate Black male's multiple flows of identity into a monolithic imaginary. Social and cultural constructions of Black maleness consistently influence the post-secondary experience of Black male students with LD. Stereotyping and stigmatizing narratives, which are conveyed and reinforced by social interactions with faculty and peers, become a “stereotype threat” that hampers the development of a positive sense of self (Steele, 1997). Instead, negatively encoded racial discourses lead to not only acceptance of self-images but also enforcement of “self-doubt” about individual abilities (Banks & Hughes, 2013)- what Du Bois (1994) refers to as the agony of “double consciousness,” in which Black males look at “one's self through the eyes of others” (p. 8).

Systemic contradictions in institutional practices. Educational institutions are sociopolitical sites of cultural practice in which certain ways of being, behaving, and interacting are legitimized (Gee, 2011). The extent to which students possess valued cultural capital yields differential positionalities in school such as “smartness” or the “troublemaker” (Hatt, 2012; Rubin, 2007). The ossified construction of Black maleness and the “symbolic” and “epistemic” violence against cultural resources of Black households and communities may negatively impact academic engagement and achievement of Black males with LD (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). At the level of K-12, Black male students have been disproportionately overrepresented in subjectively determined disability categories such as LD, behavioral disturbance (BD; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Skiba et al., 2008). Racial disproportionality in behavioral and learning disabilities may be a manifestation of pathologizing Black male bodies

combined with the historical amnesia of racial stratification. When Black male students are identified as having LD, they seem to undergo quantitatively and qualitatively different experiences from their White counterparts with the same disability label (Blanchett, Klingner, & Harry, 2009). Black students with LD are more likely to be placed in self-contained or more restrictive settings than their mainstream peers and have limited access to the general education curriculum necessary for college preparation (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Coupled with low expectation of teachers, relatively excessive concentration on alternative diploma tracks, and exemption from exit exams hinder Black students with LD's development of academic rigor for college life (Connor, 2008). Also, underutilized self-determination skills contribute to a weak development of cultural capitals indispensable for a successful transition of Black male students with LD (Banks, 2014).

Culturally incongruent interventions and discounting the cultural contexts of development magnify the opportunity gap between Black students with LD and representation of their experiences in education research. Equity-oriented pedagogical practices that validate and affirm students' cultural heritages and strengths are critical to promoting academic achievement, cultural competence, and critical consciousness of Black students with and without LD (Gay, 2002, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, as Robinson (2016) noted, current practices lack culturally appropriate strategic interventions in which Black students' experiences are utilized as assets.

In higher education, faculty members and staff's ignorance of the legal and ethical responsibility for accommodation may contribute to the underperformance of Black male collegians with LD. Federal policies (e.g., Americans with Disabilities Act) inhibit discriminatory practices and mandate the provision of reasonable accommodations. However, the nonphysical nature of LD means that self-disclosure is a critical requirement for receiving academic accommodations and services at the academic level encumber introduction of protective accommodations (Lynch & Gussel, 1997). Inadequacy in institutional supports such as professional development opportunities for faculty members and staff leave them unprepared to offer the adequate disability support services (Gladhart, 2010; Raue & Lewis, 2011). Culturally incongruent and hegemonic instructional and evaluative practices in academia contribute to the reproduction of disparities in learning opportunities along the basis of race by privileging White-middle class' notions of academic success and achievement. Rejection of nondominant perspectives on academic achievement that Black students bring to higher education institutions is a symptom of a narrow conceptualization of achievement. Providing culturally responsive accommodations and disability supports (e.g., being culturally comforting and fostering academic care) facilitates culturally affirming interactions through which black male collegians with LD develop positive self-identities deeply related to academic achievement and retention (Banks & Hughes, 2013).

The absence of a collaborative network. A lack of collaborative networks among multiple stakeholders contributes to a deprivation of learning opportunity for Black male students with LD. An absence of communication and collaboration between postsecondary personnel as well as college service providers and high school educators are possible thwarting factors to identifying disabilities and receiving evaluation documents for disability services and academic accommodations (Pellegrino, Sermons, & Shaver, 2011). Involvement of parents, families, and communities in the design and implementation of effective pedagogical practice is one of the key components to ensure improved academic achievement and retention for minority students (Epstein, 2011). Particularly, the reflection of key stakeholders' experiences,

perspectives, goals, and strengths in the process of designing transition plans is indispensable to develop culturally responsive and quality postsecondary preparation for Black male students with LD (e.g., self-determination skills; Trainor, 2005). Despite an emphasis on benefits from the involvement of stakeholders, institutional processes restrict productive and sustained engagement of potential contributors (Bal, 2017). The bureaucratic structure of school, an absence of proactive communication, use of jargon in documents, unresponsiveness of school event plans for parents who work, and lack of access to transportation, each serves as structural barriers (Epstein, 2011).

Marginalization of Black family members and communities in the process of decision-making and exclusion of resources, practices, perspectives, and goals of the community may contribute to lamentable academic growth and retention of black male students with LD. Viewing family members and cultural competence as valuable social or cultural capitals can be a starting point to develop culturally and linguistically responsive transition programs for Black male students with disabilities (Bal, 2016; Cote et al., 2012).

A Cultural-Historical Re-conceptualization

Deficit paradigms around race, gender, and disability still exercise negative influence in forming the developmental context of Black male students with and without LD. Coupled with structural inequity along the racial lines, dehumanizing cultural construction of Black male identity and stigmatization of disability generate complex and oppressive sediments in which the learning opportunity of Black male collegians with LD shrinks. A paradigmatic shift in perspective on Black male education is imperative to disrupt the present constellation of oppression constituting learning environments. As many empirical studies have reported, employing cultural assets and strengths of Black students improves the academic achievement of Black students with and without disabilities (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 2007). Taking advantage of cultural resources students bring to institutions can be a springboard to transform deficit models in which difference is perceived as the deficiency. Designing and implementing interventions should be based on social and academic aspirations, everyday needs, social networks, and everyday performances of Black male students rather than being aimed at remediation of presumed Black students' deficiency (Dumas & Nelson, 2016).

In the field of special education, the growing literature has emphasized the necessity of adoption and implementation of culturally responsive interventions for Black students with LD (Gay, 2002; Klingner & Edwards, 2006). However, culturally responsive interventions emphasizing the cultural difference between Blacks' ways of being and knowing and those of institutions privileging ontological, epistemological ways of White-middle class often leads to reductionist views of Black cultural heritage and an overly generalized and monolithic Black identity (Nasir & Hand, 2006). Similarly, emphasis on differing cultural learning styles often results in a way in which culture is understood as overly "static" and "deterministic" as if individuals are regarded as proxies of traits which particular cultural groups possess (Artiles et al., 2011; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Cultural-historical activity theory provides an interpretive lens through which to understand how learning and development are mediated or re-mediated by culture (Vygotsky, 1978). Culture provides a toolkit that enables as well as constrains human actions (Cole, 1996). Considerations of a cultural toolkit, context of activity, and interaction with key social others help us draw a new configuration of higher education in which Black male collegians with LD have improved access to opportunities to learn without being trapped in pitfalls of deficit-based models and cultural reductionism respectively focusing on individual's deficits and cultural

groups' essentialized traits in a reductionist way. In what follows, we provide a new conceptualization and pedagogical implications for addressing the exceptionality of Black males in academia on the basis of theoretical hybridization between cultural-historical activity theory and critical pedagogies.

Cultural Nature of Learning

Cultural-historical activity theory conceptualizes learning as it relates to individuals' participation in the culturally mediated, historically evolving collective activities (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Human learning is an ongoing process of appropriating historically evolving cultural artifacts-both ideal and material (e.g., a pen, language, cultural narratives) in a dialectical manner (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff et al., 2016). People adapt and change their circumstances through the mediation of artifacts. Culture as arrangements of mediational means guides our ways of thinking, acting, and interacting and provides instrumentality to deal with multiple tasks facing us. Culture regulates the ways in which we engage and achieve our goals in everyday activities with other people (Wertsch, 2007).

Culture as the constellation of historically evolving everyday practices is dynamic and protean rather than static and fixed. As social, political, and economic conditions change, everyday practices of community members are exposed to a pressure of change. Such demands create contradictions between existing cultural artifacts and practices and new conditions (Engeström, 1987; Wenger, 2000). The contradiction of activity generates a dynamic space in which existing cultural toolkits are removed, revised, as well as replaced and new tools are created to resolve emerging conflicts.

Multiple communities identified within the same racial groups, though sharing heritages and social treatments (e.g., slavery, the Jim Crow, segregation, exclusion, violence, dehumanization, as well as resistance, innovation, and art) across generations, have different social and physical conditions. The difference in the sociohistorical context leads to the emergence of the diverging purposes of everyday practices. New appearance of activity's motives demands new object, practices, rules, the division of labor, and artifacts. Such historically accumulated mediational means across generations construct shared repertoires of practice and engagement in various cultural practices within households and communities provides participants with the opportunity to make and use shared artifacts: "cultural practices both develop and transform through participation in the routine activities of relevant communities of practice" (Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014, p. 609).

Critical Pedagogies

Stereotyped discourses on Black males, rote pedagogical practices focusing on surveillance and correction of the deficiency, unwarranted categorizing practices, as well as dehumanizing interactional modes using and reinforcing the institutionalized idea of inferiority and deficit of Blackness are historically formed cultural artifacts mediating everyday practices in U.S. schools (Bal, 2017). Culturally unresponsive pedagogy, overrepresentation of Black males in school discipline, special education, and prison are outcomes resulting from dominant cultural construction of Black ways of being and knowing combined with racially stratified inequity. To overcome marginalizing practices which privilege ideological artifacts of particular groups over others, it is necessary to destabilize existing cultural constellation of antiblackness and create new conceptual tools to make a disturbance in our habitual ways of doing and thinking in addressing Black exceptionality and diversity.

"Syncretic" and "hybrid" integration of existing critical, asset-based, and equity-oriented pedagogies can be new cultural artifacts to disrupt dominant paradigm of education and imagine

and create emancipatory, expansive, and inclusive education systems for all (Bal, 2017; Gutiérrez, 2016). The academic legacy of culturally responsive and social justice-oriented pedagogies calls for a paradigmatic shift from the deficit-based pedagogy to asset-based, transformative pedagogies so as to nurture “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). These lines of inquiry emphasize designing and implementing innovative pedagogical tools grounded in everyday practices, educational aspirations, transformative agency, resistance, resilience and joy of students and their communities and reflects repertoires of the practice of home and communities as assets for learning (Paris & Alim, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yosso, 2005; Wenger, 2000). The most conspicuous feature of evolving social justice-oriented pedagogies is focusing on the dynamic nature of culture and take ever-evolving students’ youth cultures and fluid identities into consideration along with historically accumulated repertoires of practice within multiple communities (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003). Transformation-oriented pedagogies advocate various learning experiences of students and seek to go beyond all "dichotomizing" practices (e.g., individual/society, formal education/informal education, and past/present; Rogoff, Callanan, Gutiérrez, & Erickson, 2016). These collaborative and humanizing works acknowledge the significance of what Black male students with LD experience out of educational institutions through their participation in multiple everyday practices with ever-changing repertoires of practice. Creating new learning environments for historically marginalized students should build on an understanding of the complex web of human development in which individual’s developmental trajectory, socially shared repertoires for everyday activities, and individual’s momentary actions are inextricably interwoven (Cole, 1996).

Re-Mediating Learning Environments

In this paper, we merge central tenets emerging from theoretical hybridization between cultural-historical activity theory and critical pedagogies to re-conceptualize and re-mediate present cultural practices with –not for- Black males with LD in higher education (Gutiérrez, 2012). First of all, culturally responsive practices for dealing with Black males with LD should go beyond simply applying what is defined as cultural heritages of Blacks by educational researchers into teaching and learning. Cultural reductionism deeming students as passive objects of top-down academic and behavioral interventions is unlikely to reflect both dynamic agencies and complex identities which Black male collegians with LD actively form. The dynamic nature in ever-changing Black male collegian culture formed by the complex interplay among heritages, popular culture, media, as well as disability culture should be considered in the process of designing culturally responsive interventions in which students, their families as active participants join educators and administrators at colleges.

College classrooms should become generative spaces providing students with the fertile ground upon which multiple forms of artifacts and social others are legitimized to enrich or expand repertoires of practice for learning and teaching. Heterogeneous cultural resources that both faculty and college students bring to the classroom are utilized for hybridization through which new knowledge, skills, and emotional responses emerge as new cultural artifacts. Lived experiences of “Black,” “male,” and “learning disability” become significant resources to expand shared repertoires of practice in the college classroom for all students. Participation structures in the traditional classroom in which the role of Black students with LD is marginalized as incompetent or inferior learners need to be rethought. In a newly imagined context of expansive learning, Black male students with LD take active roles as what Vygotsky (1978) referred to as, knowledgeable social others whose knowledge, skills, ways of knowing, and ways of being, help

to expand a zone of proximal development in/through which students, educators as well as the higher education contexts learn and change.

Pedagogical practices also should serve as praxis through which a cycle of reflection and action facilitate transformative learning (Freire, 2000). Current hegemonic, symbolic constructs about Black male body and disability are employed as mediational and strategic artifacts to raise critical consciousnesses of all collegians including Black male college students with LD about social inequity and injustice. At the same time, students are allowed to use their resources of home, community, youth, and disability culture as potential tools not only for improvement of their academic achievement but also for the development of counter-hegemonic narratives against oppressive discourses around race, gender, and ability. In other words, a new form of pedagogy facilitates the “embodiment of imagination” and “catalyst for thinking a new.” (Cole, Göncü, & Vadeboncoeur, 2014). New pedagogy encourages “imaginability” of Black males with disabilities by providing a transformative space in which students can weave their lived experiences with imagination in a concrete environment (Cole, 1996). Wartofsky (1979) explained these imaginative artifacts as “the forms of representation themselves come to constitute a ‘world’ (or ‘worlds’) of imaginative praxis” (p. 207). Development of counter-hegemonic narratives is necessary to escape from the agony of socially offered anti-Blackness and fear of being labeled with LD. Furthermore, development of counter-hegemonic narratives is closely linked to enhancement and enactment of self-determined skills indispensable for the gain of appropriate academic accommodations (Banks & Hughes, 2013).

Addressing Black exceptionality in higher education is a “double bind” in nature since contradictory practices in educating Black male collegians with LD is “*a social, societally essential dilemma which cannot be resolved through separate individual actions alone—but in which joint co-operative actions can push a historically new form of activity into emergence*” (Engeström, 1987, p. 165, italics in the original). In this sense, building a collaborative network among multiple stakeholders is crucial for academic success and prosperity of Black male students with LD. We emphasize the change in hierarchical participation structures resulting in the marginalization of multiple epistemologies that families and community members bring into institutions. Based on decentralizing dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981), we suggest participatory justice through which diverse perspectives, goals, and repertoires of practice become resources to facilitate building an equity-oriented coalition (Bal, 2012). Participants involved in collaborative networks act as “boundary brokers” crossing heterogeneous systems and multiple perspectives, expertise, and experiences existing in boundaries are employed to create new instrumentality facilitating academic growth and social engagement of Black males with LD. In other words, taking advantage of collective imagination, transformative agency, and distributed expertise among stakeholders can facilitate an emergence of new forms of “actionable knowledge” and a creation of innovative tools to destabilize existing contradictory pedagogical practices for Black students with LD (Engeström, 1987).

Structural contradictions within institutions of academia are part of a larger systemic problem extending beyond individual actors (e.g., students or professionals). Such an issue then calls for a systemic solution that critically examines the cultural and historical practices within higher education. Higher education and transition literature lack transformative, inclusive interventions aiming to disrupt and transform systemic processes that reproduce negative academic and social outcomes that Black students with LD and other nondominant students face. Unification of cultural-historical activity theory and critical pedagogies has provided interventions methodologies for navigating the re-mediating of learning environments in preK-12

schools such as Learning Lab (Bal, 2011, 2016). Learning Lab seeks to democratize decision-making processes by reflecting multiple voices of students, families, and community members which heretofore have been marginalized in school systems and experience negative behavioral outcomes such as overrepresentation in special education programs for LD and behavioral disorders. As a task force, Learning Labs address a historical contradiction (racial disproportionality) through an inclusive problem solving and decision-making process. Learning Labs have been implemented in public schools facing racial disparities. They included students, family members, teachers, paraprofessionals, education leaders, community members, civic organizations (e.g., Urban League) and university-based interventionists. Learning Lab members get together over 8-10 monthly meetings in an academic year and examine their system (school discipline system) in place and its outcomes (e.g., overrepresentation of Black students in school disciplinary actions; Bal, Kozleski, Schrader, Rodriguez, & Pelton, 2014). Then, they engage in root cause analyses and develop a new system—culturally responsive behavioral support system—based on resources, needs, and goals of their local school community (Bal, 2016). Finally, members implement their new system in the following year and examine and refine their new system continuously. Higher education institutions can utilize Learning Lab and other community-based, inclusive systemic interventions. Leveraging the collective imaginations, aspirations, cultural tools, distributed expertise, and transformative agency across heterogeneous boundaries allows for the invention of new practices and tools contributing to the creation of a safer and more inclusive educational ecology with Black male students with LD.

Conclusion

Racial disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes for Black male students with LD in academia are outcomes of a racially stratified society. Cultural constructions of race and disability have become the dominant idealistic artifacts which are reified through our habitual ways of interacting and doing in addressing the needs of Black male students with and without LD. Institutionalized injustice is a visible form of inner contradictions of racial hierarchy along the color line. Reframing efforts are imperative to create new contexts of development in which Black male students actualize their potentials, achieve educational and social aspirations, and experience acceptance and joy in academia. Designing and implementing new pedagogical practices to disrupt asymmetrical power relations existing in society should begin with a reexamination of the taken for granted ontological and epistemological underpinnings of pedagogical practices with stakeholders, specifically those historically excluded from decision-making activities in higher education (Bal, 2012; 2017).

Ontologically, new pedagogies should reflect the dynamic and changeable nature of being. Multidirectional movements of social actors in variable social contexts should be the important consideration in the design and implementation of innovative interventions. Ontological diversity inherent in human beings should be re-conceptualized from confounding factors interrupting scientific rigor to a locus of creativity for development of newly re-mediating instrumentality. Epistemologically, multiple ways of knowing should be legitimized as the situated mode of knowledge production. Polyvocality, boundary-crossing works, and employment of collective intelligence can become a catalyst for pedagogical innovation (Engeström, 2008). Remodeling participation structures is a starting point to build the robust partnership among multiple stakeholders. In turn, such collaborative relationship can contribute to maximizing learning opportunity of Black male students with LD. Coordinated commitments to transform existing social arrangements should include the generative agency of stakeholders as a driving force of transformation and innovation. Resilience and creativity developed through

Black male students' everyday actions against racial disparities and aspirations for desired futures should be acknowledged as the valued cultural and social capitals necessary to become co-designers capable of modeling and concretizing their futures and the future of academia.

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