

## Introduction to the Special Issue

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This special issue of the *Journal of African American Males in Education* (JAAME) sheds light on the experiences of African American males in P-20 settings who have learning disabilities. To date there has been limited scholarship that addresses African American males who have learning disabilities. As a result, this has left many unanswered questions related to support, theory, and experiential knowledge (Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012; Robinson, 2015a). For instance, Lindo (2006) examined a decade of articles published in *Reading Research Quarterly* (1994–2004), the *Journal of Educational Psychology* (1994–2004), and the *Journal of Scientific Study of Reading* (1997–2007) and found that no research articles reported conclusions by race.

As expected, Lindo recommended increasing the literature base and quantity of studies and scholarship on African American students in general, but males in particular (Robinson, 2013, 2015b). Therefore, as the editors of this special issue we agreed that *JAAME* was an best venue to raise awareness of such an understudied and frankly neglected topic and population. Each article shares recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers to consider as they work toward the creation of educational environments designed to meet the specific needs of African American male students with learning disabilities. Since the special focuses on the matriculation of African American students throughout the P-20 educational pipeline the manuscripts are in sequential order by developmental stages.

In the first article, Wright and Ford focus on the special education pipeline, specifically early childhood education. They address the need for preventative interventions to ensure academic success of African American boys. Drawing upon work associated with African American boys being “convicted in the womb,” the authors urge readers to challenge those who seek to criminalize African American boys.

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The second article “Educators’ Perceptions of Twice Exceptional African American Males,” Mayes addresses a timely and understudied area of research focusing on gifted African American males in special education. Mayes conducted a qualitative study to gain additional insight on the experiences, successes, and challenges that educators and counselors face in supporting these students. Five educators from a large, urban district participated in interviews and the findings resulted in four major themes emerging: (1) challenges with identification; (2) lack of information shared; (3) myths and barriers; and (4) training and support for all gifts.

In the third article, “The Other Half Hasn’t Been Told: African American Males and their Success in Special Education,” Wright, Crawford, and Counsell employed a qualitative case study aimed at unpacking the schooling experiences and outcomes of African American males in special education, which resulted in how one academically successful African American male, diagnosed with an intellectual disability, met and exceeded school expectations within his general education experience. Further, their study underscores the significance of listening to students, building strong home-school collaborations, and creating supportive networks as important ways to better understand and promote student academic performance and outcomes.

In the fourth article, “Reaching Higher: College and Career Readiness for African American Males,” Harris, Mayes, Vega, and Hines discuss how collaboration between school counselors and school psychologists can support African American males who have learning disabilities by promoting positive academic, social, personal, and career development needed for post-secondary educational opportunities. The authors assert that more qualitative studies would reveal the experiences of African American students in special education as well as the themes associated with positive outcomes around college and career readiness.

In the fifth article, “The Voices of African American Male Students with Disabilities Attending Historically Black Universities,” Banks discusses findings that investigate the experiences of African American male college students with disabilities attending a historically Black university. Banks employed qualitative interviews to examine how family involvement in selecting a university, importance of academic and social belonging, faculty support, and unique culturally based disability support services influenced their development. This resulted in institutions actively constructing environments that facilitate academic engagement while being intentional in the development of an inclusive curriculum that addresses issues of equity and cultural differences for African American students with disabilities.

The sixth article titled “School-Family-Community Collaboration for African American Males with Disabilities”, Booth, Butler, Richardson, Washington, and Henfield assert that there is a marginal body of research addressing African American males with learning disabilities. The authors’ purpose is not only to present relevant research, but also to provide personal vignettes that emphasize culturally responsive school-family-community collaborations (SFC), which can facilitate positive outcomes for African American males with learning disabilities. The authors discuss the ways in which effective school-family-community alliances ameliorate difficulties that potentially hinder African American males with learning disabilities from achieving postsecondary, occupational, and educational success.

In the final article, “About F.A.C.E.: Increasing the Identification of African American Males with Dual Exceptionalities,” Trotman Scott discusses how cultural mismatch, deficit thinking, and cool pose affect the under-identification of Black males with dual exceptionalities, more specifically, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and giftedness. Trotman Scott shares her conceptual framework and provides recommendations to provide children with the support needed to achieve a successful and fulfilling academic experience. Such support

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includes finding African American males with dual exceptionalities who are successful and willing to share their story, acknowledging personal biases, increasing the number of culturally competent teachers, and engaging students in activities that will cater to their strengths.

To close this special issue Davis articulates a powerful book review of Ta-Nehisi Coates book *Between the World and Me* which is an appropriate framework for understanding America's history and current academic crisis, as well as acknowledging the social injustice that African American males who have learning disabilities in special education experience throughout the P–20 educational pipeline.

As co-editors, we are pleased to share this set of readings with the hope that they are used to help improve the lives of African Americans who have special education needs. This student group has been neglected for far too long which results in numerous and extensive gaps in knowledge, theory, and academic support (Hoyles & Hoyles, 2010). We are aware that this special issue neither fills *all* voids nor meets *all* needs. Nonetheless, the articles have much to offer in the field of Special Education and beyond. The P–20 pipeline must be better understood for and responsive to the special education population. In addition, a focus on prevention and early intervention is essential in order to support these students, their families, and their educators to reduce the special education-to-prison pipeline that is destroying our students, communities, and nation.

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