
On April 2nd 2014, State superintendent Tony Evers of Wisconsin organized a task force of educators who would not only examine contributing factors of the achievement gap, but also recommend solutions to close the gap between Black and White students. In fact, two elements not discussed when dealing with the achievement gap among Black males are dyslexia and the proper remediation (Robinson, 2013). As an illustration of what can be achieved academically among Black males with dyslexia, the example of Ennis Cosby is used. He was determined to achieve his goals, fulfill his greatness and repudiate the constraints of the deficits associated with dyslexia. Ennis enrolled in a college program aimed at teaching students with dyslexia how to read and develop the skills needed to succeed academically. After graduation he continued his education and was motivated to help other students in similar situations.

Regrettably, not every Black male with dyslexia in Wisconsin is fortunate enough to enroll in a college program designed to help them learn to read as many of them are academically unprepared and do not meet college entrance requirements. In terms of college readiness, only 54% of Blacks have taken the core curriculum in high school compared to 78% of Whites, and only 4% of Black students were college ready in all four ACT-tested subjects compared to 39% of Whites (Children’s Defense Fund, [CDF], 2014).

Unfortunately, like many Black males in Wisconsin, Ennis’s life ended January 16, 1997 as a result of violence and again, society had lost another Black male (Alexander, 2010). According to the CDF (2014), Black adolescents are five times
more likely to be killed by guns than Whites. As a matter of fact, a majority of Black males have their potential cut short daily, not only from violence and deficit attitudes displayed by some teachers in the academic systems (Ford, 2013), but also from being denied the permanent joy, liberation and success that comes with learning how to read, which has been evident from the major national and local reading gaps (Aud et al., 2012; Barton & Coley, 2009; CDF, 2014; Lindo, 2006; Hoyles & Hoyles, 2010).

**Black Males In Wisconsin**

Prior to discussing the recommendations, it’s critical to provide a synopsis of problems affecting our Black males in Wisconsin. First, 89% of Blacks read below grade level compared to 59% of White students, and Black eighth-graders’ reading scores are ranked the lowest in the country. This is not surprising given that statistically the average reading score has made minimum change since 1992 (CDF, 2014; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012).

Second, even with all the enthusiasm in Wisconsin's academic scene and time spent on the Common Core Standards (Compton-Lilly, 2013), Black student’s reading achievement remains stagnant, and to reemphasize, 91% of Black eight-graders were reading below grade level compared to 58% of White students (CDF, 2014). Over the past several years the State has been faced with an economic crisis (e.g., budget cuts), but spends roughly $36,773 per prisoner, but only $11,453 per public school student annually. As educators, we shouldn’t be surprised with such an achievement gap as the investment is not in education, but in the prison industry for our Black males (Alexander, 2010; CDF, 2014).

Under these circumstances, nothing has significantly improved in terms of the reading performance of Black males with dyslexia and up to the present time we continue to witness the reading gap increase across the state (e.g., Green Bay, Madison and Milwaukee). As a state, during the 2012-2013 academic year, Black students scored 11.6% proficient, 34.7% basic, 42.3% minimal performance and had no percent in advanced reading levels. In contrast, White students were 35.9% proficient, 39.5% basic, 17.7% minimal performance and 6.6% advanced, and yet, in the years preceding the 2012-2013 academic year, the reading gaps were severely disproportionate (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, [WDPI], 2014).

And finally, the State must encourage researchers and teachers to address Black males who are not receiving effective interventions and those who are misdiagnosed with needs other than
dyslexia. This should be a wake up call for parents, policy makers, state officials, administrators and special education teachers (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Blanchett 2010; Blanchett, Klingner & Harry, 2009; Buly & Valencia, 2002; Ferguson, 2003; Silliman, Wilkinson & Brea-Spahn, 2004). In summary, research on dyslexia and how it impacts Black males’ reading proficiency and their academic attainment is limited, and teachers need to be knowledgeable about dyslexia, its effective remediation and how it contributes to the achievement gap (Robinson, 2013). Thus, the remainder of this paper presents recommendations on how teachers can increase the reading proficiency of Black males with dyslexia, which can also contribute to their academic achievement.

**Purpose**

With the statewide reading crisis among our Black males with dyslexia who are getting left behind, the purpose of this paper is to provide three recommendations for academic attainment. These include, but are not limited to: (1) using systematic interventions, (2) teaching vocabulary and (3) using scientific-based reading curriculum. In the final section, a rationale will be presented on why this agenda is so relevant in the field of Language and Literacy.

**Recommendations**

**Systematic intervention**

First, students must learn to crack the language code and become good decoders who can read fluently (Catts, Hogan & Adlof, 2005; Moats & Dakin, 2007). In fact, students with dyslexia have “difficulty in learning to decode and encode, which hinders their ability to accurately or fluently recognize words as the result of having a deficit in the phonological component of language” (Lyon, Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2003; p. 2). Given that students will have difficulty acquiring reading skills at a proficient or at advanced levels, which is not only evident by the State reading scores, but also from relevant scholarship (Byrnes & Wasik, 2009; Gustafson, Ferreira & Ronnberg, 2007; Wolf, 2007).

There are many different systematic interventions that teachers can use, but one specific intervention used at the collegiate level, Pure and Complete Phonics (PCP), has been shown to not only increase students’ spelling, but also correct the language deficits of students with dyslexia (Nash, 2012). The goal of PCP is to allow students to master the entire phonemic sound structure of the American-English language, which will influence their cognitive development, increase competence and help them become independent learners.
I (2013) assert that PCP is a systematic intervention that teaches how to spell and read words by their left-to-right sequential sound structure using the dictionary’s diacritical marks. For example, the word PERPLEX is used to show the systematic procedures of PCP. In the Webster’s Colligate Dictionary 11th ed. the word PERPLEX is on page 923 and the word is written out twice in both dark and less than dark print. The latter identifies the phonetic assignment of a given letter or letter-combination.

Each letter/letter-team has a diacritical mark placed above it to illustrate the way the graphemes are identified by sound. The first syllable is an R-controlled syllable (R.C.S.) because the sound of the vowel preceding the (r) is masked by the overwhelming sound of the (r) within the syllable. The second syllable is a close syllable (C.S.) because a C.S. contains an isolated vowel (or vowel representation) followed by one or more [voiced/non-voiced] consonants in the syllable. The above illustration shows how the phonetic assignment of a given letter or a letter-combination is identified and how the word is pronounced from left to right.

After extensive systematic intervention that focuses on that type of multi-sensory and explicit instruction, a student can expect to become independent in the areas of spelling and reading. The intervention incorporates a Simultaneous Tri-modal Multi-Sensory Instructional Procedure that accentuates grapheme-phoneme representation, which can also help students increase their vocabulary.

(McMurray, et al., 2008; Nash, 2012; Parker & Riley, 2010; Rost & McMurray, 2009).

**Vocabulary instruction**

The second area of research that is so critical to the advancement of Black males with dyslexia is vocabulary instruction. Baumann (2009) highlighted the importance of not only background knowledge, but also how vocabulary and comprehension have been linked. Word knowledge is a prerequisite for comprehending sentences, content and overall passages of a text, and teachers...
Black Males in Wisconsin Getting Left Behind

should be aware of four-components of effective instruction and use them to effect positive outcomes in this critical area (Ehri & Snowling, 2004).

The first component is to provide rich and varied language experiences that include reading aloud - the text and reader-listener interactions and independent reading – learn to read by reading (Goodman & Goodman, 2009). The second component, teaching individual words is significantly linked to reading comprehension and effective teachers provide opportunities for them to become automatic spellers and readers.

The third component, teaching word-learning strategies, focuses on morphological analysis and contextual analysis, which are vital for boosting students' word knowledge and comprehension (Duke, Pressley & Hilden, 2004). Carlisle (2004) discussed how instruction should include the identification of affixes and root words. Students' ability to identify the smallest word or word parts that have meaning usually starts in preschool years and is imperative to their construction of comprehension (Duke, et. al., 2011).

In fact, when teaching word knowledge, the suffix changes the noun into a verb (e.g., such as in bike to biking), as this knowledge is critical for gaining meaning from print (Roth, 2004). This type of instruction is not done in isolation, as it should be taught in a multi-strategy instruction that emphasizes both morphological and contextual analysis (Troia, 2004). It is important to remember there is no ‘one’ best instructional method when teaching word-learning, as different approaches are needed for different circumstances. The fourth and final component, word consciousness, is described as a component of the student’s metalinguistic awareness (Westby, 2004). Word consciousness is a critical element of vocabulary building and as students learn to look for roots, affixes and suffixes in the formation of a word they will start developing the ability to understand multiple meanings.

Finally, once students receive a systematic intervention that not only increases their decoding ability, but also on their vocabulary, they are able to work on higher-level cognitive skills such as reading to learn from texts and discern meaning (Carlisle & Rice, 2004; Vaughn & Klingner, 2004). Such instruction allows students to work on critically reading various texts and for Black males with dyslexia it should include culturally relevant curriculum (Fairbanks, et al. 2009; Gay, 2002).

Reading curriculum
Teachers must remember that task difficulty should not surpass a student’s level of learning as that can cause disruptive behaviors, and if any real learning is to occur, the material should match the student’s skill level. In that case, students can fully comprehend the material, make meaning and engage in critical dialogue to further analyzing and synthesizing several texts with the fundamental purpose of constructing arguments (Afflerbach & Young Cho, 2009; Cartwright, 2009; Dole, Nokes & Drits, 2009; Martin & Duke, 2011).

Teachers must provide an effective reading curriculum by introducing culturally relevant curriculum to Black students with dyslexia, which recognizes their cultural backgrounds and embraces their culture in the classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2012, 2000; Malloy & Gambrell, 2011). In addition, Ford (2013), Tatum and Muhammad (2012), and Tatum (2011, 2009, 2008), advocated that learning needs to be viewed through a sociocultural lens, lived experiences, along with considering how meaning is constructed through peer interaction, which has the power to shape students’ learning (Almasi & Garas-York, 2009; Ford, 2011; Fuchs et al., 2011; Raphael et al., 2009).

Thus, it is argued that such curriculum can provide a platform for Black males with dyslexia to acquire and accumulate new knowledge through social interactions. Constructing knowledge through their socio-cultural experiences allows them to understand themselves and shape their identities, which can help teachers understand how Black males with dyslexia have navigated the educational systems and constructed knowledge (Gavelek & Bresnahan, 2009).

In fact when students are negotiating and navigating the educational systems they are bringing their lived experiences, and private literacies to the classroom curriculum, which helps them build new knowledge (Darnico, Campano & Harste, 2009). With this in mind, for Black males with dyslexia to reach a higher level of consciousness and become critical thinkers, the inclusion of reading curriculum must force students to become consumers of new knowledge.

To build that new knowledge, Black males with dyslexia need curriculum that challenges their intellectual abilities by engaging in think-a louds and questioning (Baker & Beall, 2009; Leslie & Caldwell, 2009). By all means, asking specific content questions can encourage Black males with dyslexia to participate in meaningful conversations, challenge their metacognition and encourage them to become academically engaged (Miller & Faircloth, 2009; Guthrie et al., 2009). However, if Black males with
dyslexia are not engaged in such practices, they may not be allowed the fortune of acquiring and accumulating new knowledge, which continues to leave them victims of unconsciousness and with a self-defeating attitude about their abilities as scholars (Ford, 2013).

**Conclusion**

Given the state of affairs for Black males with dyslexia in Wisconsin, it is not surprising that they are not academically excelling like their peers or getting pushed into the justice system (Alexander, 2010; CDF, 2014; Ivey, 2014; WDPI, 2014). This research agenda is not only relevant, but also timely in the field of education as there are currently limited theories and teaching models that promote complete transformation in the State or in academic institutions for Black males with dyslexia.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to address Black males with dyslexia in Wisconsin getting left behind. As shown in the example of Ennis Cosby, there is hope for Black males with dyslexia, and when there is a discussion of the achievement gap, politicians, school officials or task forces must address dyslexia and the proper remediation (Wolf, 2007). Students need extensive systematic interventions that focus on explicit instruction that incorporates a Simultaneous Tri-modal Multi-Sensory instructional procedure that accentuates grapheme-phoneme representation, which will also helps increase their vocabulary (Nash, 2012).

In the long run, if Black males with dyslexia are not engaged in such exercises or reading curriculum that is culturally relevant (Fairbanks, et al. 2009; Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2012), they may not be allowed the opulence of developing and accumulating new knowledge, which will continue to leave them victims of self-defeating attitudes. As a state, we can make progress in closing the achievement gap when we start examining dyslexia (Moats & Dakin, 2007) and stop framing their learning from a deficit model (Ford, 2013). In the end, we can't afford to continue to accept that they are being denied the permanent joy, liberation and success that one experiences with learning how to read (Barton & Coley, 2009; Lindo, 2006; Hoyles & Hoyles, 2010). Therefore, implementing the recommendations can be a start to not only decreasing the reading gap, but also to have an impact on academic attainment of Black males with dyslexia in Wisconsin (Robinsor, 2013).

**References**


in-nation-for-black-children/article_7ec1a1fc-b923-11e3-828c-0019bb2963f4.html


Tatum, A. W. (2008). Toward a more anatomically complete model of


Shawn Anthony Robinson M.Ed. is a doctoral candidate in the Language and Literacy program at Cardinal Stritch University and an Inclusive Excellence Fellow at the University of Wisconsin Whitewater in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction; email s2robinson@wolfmail.stritch.edu

Copyright © 2014 by the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English.