

We Need to Talk About Education

A Zine About the Fight for
Social Justice in Special
Education

Community Voices and
Experiences About Dis/Ability
and Race in Waterloo, IA

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[Image description: Silhouettes of children in overlapping conversation bubbles.]

We Need to Talk About Education: A Zine About the Fight for Social Justice in Special Education

Accounts and text within this zine are from the participants of the *Equity Spotlight Vodcast* [Creating Brave Spaces for Community Voices in the Fight for Race and Disability-based Justice in Special Education](#).

In this zine*, we emphasize key lessons from community members in Waterloo, IA, who came together to share their experiences with race and dis/ability in local schools.

What is a Zine?

A zine is “a small, self-published and distributed magazine rising from the feminist, punk and activist movements of the 1980s. Zines are often used to share personal and political views...zines can be an important part of art practice in that they can showcase art in a widely distributable and accessible manner. Zine culture fosters community, sharing, collaboration and innovation. Zines are a method of diversifying practice, but they can also be a practice unto themselves” (Pickering, 2018, para. 2).

A *zine*, also known as a *fanzine*, are pamphlets, usually self-published or published by a small, independent publisher. Zines are used as platforms away from mainstream media to amplify marginalized communities’ voices. Through underground publications, authors take control of the publishing process and get to authentically connect with various communities and organizations.

Popularly used for spreading art, poetry, and radical political information to those who can not access it, we’ve utilized the creation of a zine to serve a similar purpose and distribute academic information to multiple audiences. This makes our message accessible to those who may need and want it the most. Complete with illustrations and definitions, this zine can be distributed to communities, schools, and local organizations.

****All illustrations within this zine, except for the cover art, are by Vincent Ali.***

[Watermark graphic image description: Black and Brown people with diverse hairstyles.]

We Need to Talk About Education: A Note

Roadmap to the Zine:

This zine captures all definitions and accounts from the partnering [Vodcast](#), paired with illustrations that reflect or expand on the topics.

The zine is organized by a set of themes that participants brought up in the Vodcast discussion. The themes are interconnected and illustrate how they experienced their childrens' educational experiences and their interactions with the educational system. To organize the zine, we describe each theme, and then include quotes from Vodcast participants that illustrate these themes as they have experienced them in experienced in Waterloo:

- Disproportionality
- Health
- Punishment and Treatment
- Intersectionality
- The Impact of Traditional School Policies, Practices and Structures on Black Youth and Families
- The Significance Race and Racial Microaggressions Play on Our Experiences in K-12 school
- (Special) Education as a Racialized Experience
- The Urgency of Culturally Responsive Educators for Black, Indigenous and Youth of Color with and without Dis/Abilities
- The Fallout of Interlocking Identity Oppressions
- Racial and Dis/Ability Structural and Psychological Segregation
- Discipline is Not Created Equally Along Race and Dis/Ability
- The Need for DisCrit Administrative Practices and Policies for Systemic Change Efforts
- The Importance of Communicative and Non-Violent Practices
- The Lack of Follow Through and Systems of Support
- Valuing and Respecting Black Children's Humanity and Gifts in Education

Grounding Framework: Dis/Crit

Dis/Ability Critical Race Theory (DisCrit) (Annamma et al., 2013), is a combination of Critical Race Theory framework and Disability Studies. DisCrit was developed and coined to face the intersectionality of disability and race as they operate in the educational setting. Annamma, Connor, and Ferri (2013) first explored the evolution of medical and scientific racism, citing its impact on educational institutions of the present day. The text describes the overrepresentation and underrepresentation of marginalized communities through the lens of race and dis/ability in academia and in incarceration. Further, white supremacist ideology has shaped the medical and academic belief that Black people as a whole are *mentally inferior* and *underdeveloped*. This belief trickles into classroom and institutional settings.

[Watermark graphic image description: Black and Brown people with diverse hairstyles.]

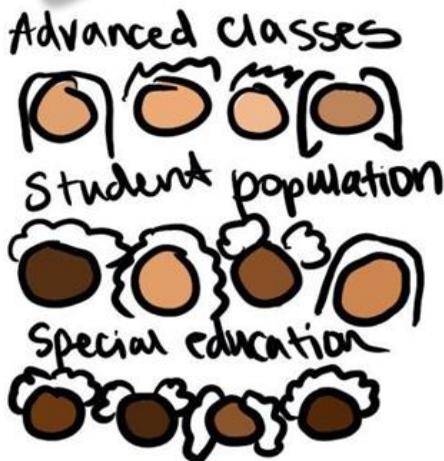


Disproportionality of Students of Color in Special Education and the Impacts of Educational Labeling:

Less representation of a group than expected in a particular category (underrepresentation) or more of special education representation than anticipated (overrepresentation) (e.g., Artiles, 2019).

We have policies and practices, or dilemmas of practice, such as disproportionality, of more historically marginalized students in special education when they need help, right?

-David Hernández-Saca



[Graphic image description: Three rows of students. The top row shows light skinned children with diverse hairstyles; they are labeled as the representation of advanced classes. Below them is an even mix of darker skinned and light skinned children with diverse hairstyles; they are labeled as the representation of the student population as a whole. Below them is a group of darker skinned children with textured hair, representing the students in special education classes and programs.]



The Importance of Health Considerations for BIPOC Youth in School Policies and Practices:

Health is the health of the body and the wellbeing of the person. Body Health might be seen as the wholeness of the body (and brain).

This is sometimes wrongfully understood as living without disease or Dis/Ability. But the Health of a person may be understood as the whole being of the person. A better understanding that says health is when all aspects of a person's life are good.

When we're creating our syllabus, when we're creating our curriculum, we're thinking about the single parent, we're thinking about the person with physical cognitive mental health.

-Professor Chatara Mabry



[Graphic image description: Three people with brown skin in a row. The first has a full red heart on the body but a question mark on their face. The word health is beneath them with a question mark at the end. The second has a question mark on the body but a full red heart on the face. The word health is beneath them with a question mark at the end. The last person has a full red heart in the body and a heart on the face, with red triangles around their head. The triangles represent excitement and fulfillment. The word health is beneath them but this time with an exclamation mark at the end.]

Punishment and Treatment of BIPOC youth in Educational Settings: The infliction of an undesirable or unpleasant outcome on children. In the context of the zine and Vodcast, punishment is specifically in reference to students regarding their experiences with education in the K-12 setting.

And their way of handling this constant bullying was duct taping me to this child. And that, of course, as I'm sure you guys know, would be a traumatic situation for a child who was just recently diagnosed with this cognitive issue or impairment, and also a child who's already suffering with other abuse issues at home. So being duct taped to this boy, and having my mouth duct taped like I was cattle was to me, I think the beginning of my interest and fighting and advocating for children of Color.

-Jamisia Young

Because I feel like when you look at people, who are corrected instead of helped, it is mostly kids of Color that end up getting the correction, instead of the help.

-Participant

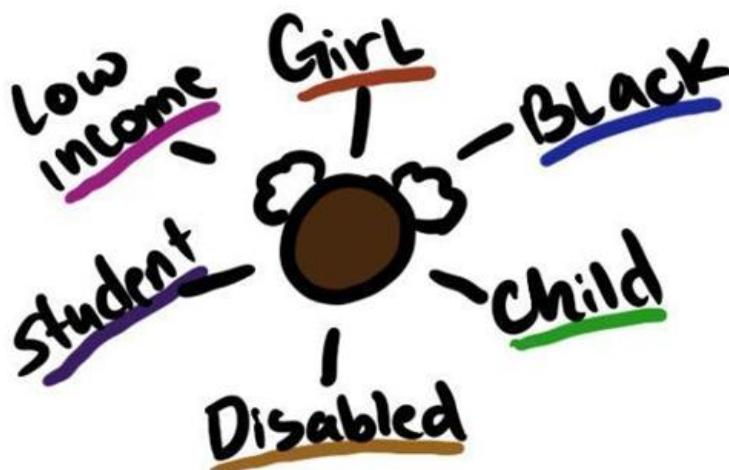


[Graphic image description: There four children, separated into pairs by a jagged line between them. On the left are two light skinned children, with the words "children" and "instructed" below them in quotation marks. On the right are two darker skinned children who have the words "delinquent" and "corrected" below them in quotation marks.]

Intersectionality of BIPOC youth's identities with Race and Disability: Intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), advocated for the acknowledgement of the marginalized identities of Black women in legal settings, where legal protections pertaining to Black men and white women did not extend to Black women. Contemporarily, intersectionality refers to individuals at the nexus of multiple historically marginalized identities (e.g., non-white, woman/girl, LGBTQ+, dis/abled, etc.). It observes the compounded effects of identity + race, and the systemic oppression, prejudicial treatment, and interaction among these dynamics (Jackson et al., 2018).

So I do agree, intersectionality is identities, power and privilege. But I think, in essence, there's power in that itself. Understanding as teachers, social workers, and other social servants, that you need to leverage your power in the places you have power. So that you can give an opportunity for BIPOC or other marginalized populations to have a safe space to then also leverage their power.

-Professor Chatara Mabry



[Graphic image description: A dark skinned child with textured afro puffs. There are identifiers around her that read "Low income," "Girl," "Black," "Student," "Disabled," and "Child."]

The Impact of Traditional School Policies, Practices and Structures on Black Youth and Families:

This section is talking about the daily schedules, classroom structures, methods of punishment, codes of conduct, curriculum and treatment of children in public schooling.

I think it's important for me to be involved to share my personal story that I've had in the Cedar Valley to not only just disrupt the hegemonies, but also to disrupt the whiteness that's always perpetrated in our school districts in our schools and our classrooms...he [Cedric] calls it out and he says, these things in school, "Like you always do this because I'm Black..."

-Joyce Levingston

I remember Cedric was at school one time and he splashed water from the water fountain out at a kid, and the school called me like he had drowned the kid in a pool.

-Joyce Levingston

[Graphic image description: Two children throwing water, with "vs" between them, representing a double standard. On the left is a dark skinned child with a textured afro. Above their head are red horns, and below him the words "The Aggressor" in quotations and underlined in red. This child is throwing water. On the right is a lighter skinned child with a golden halo above them, and the word beneath them say "Playing Child."]



The Impact Race and Racial Microaggressions has on Our Experiences in

K-12 School: Learning while Black and attending a predominantly white school.

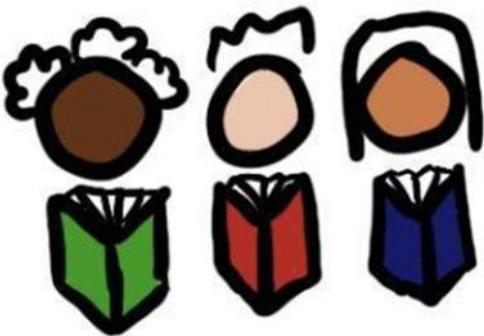
Teachers have even mocked him like “and it's not because you're Black.” As a parent, I’m thinking how now, once again, when I pick up my child from school, do I need to console them or debrief them, or come up with my own counseling for them? As Black parents often have to do almost every damn day when they pick up their kids for school.

-Joyce Levingston



[Graphic image description: Three dark skinned children with diverse complexions and textured hairstyles underneath a rain cloud that is pouring rain on them. They have frowns on their faces and exclamation marks, question marks, and a squiggle above their heads to represent confusion and frustration.]

(Special) Education as a Racialized Experience: Education within the United States has not only controlled and excluded many groups, but mostly Black and African American kids, given the whiteness of the system of education.



[Graphic image description: Three children of diverse complexions and hair styles reading a green, red, and blue book.]

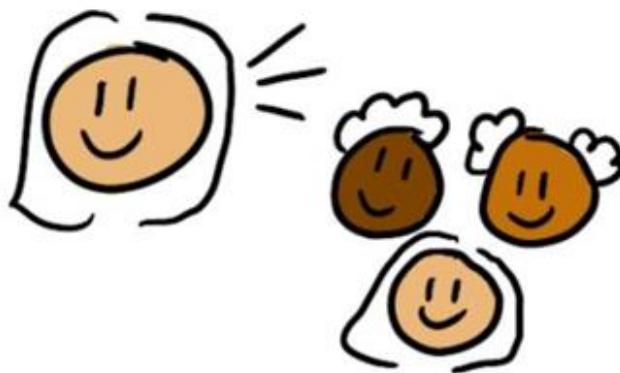
Even in special education more so, and also to highlight the disproportionality that really happens in special education..You know, being able to point this out with my level of education, Cedric is 11 years old and just finished sixth grade, and is able to point that out because of experience after experience after experience after experience...

-Joyce Levingston

The Need for Culturally Responsive Educators for Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color with and without Dis/Abilities: The fourth and last theme from the caregiver interviews of Joyce talked about themes like whiteness, awareness, questions, and positionality. Joyce points to the need for culturally responsive educators.

I've become such a helicopter parent I would prefer you know, daily communication with my child's educators and also I would prefer even on a personal level to text...I think things that educators could do to make Cederic feel safe is really like, to decolonize their mind..

-Joyce Levingston



[Graphic image description: A group of children with diverse complexions and hairstyles. They are speaking to an adult figure representing the teacher. They are all smiling.]

The Impact of Facing Different Forms of Oppression at the Same Time:

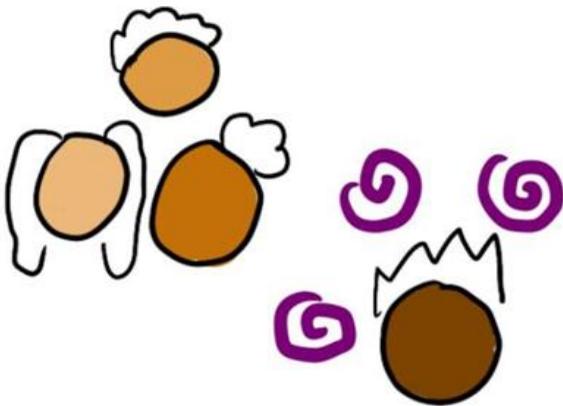
Overlooked, ignored and underappreciated. Latrina speaks of the need to not overlook and ignore students who struggle, but it is important to disrupt master deficit thinking and language narratives that further marginalizes such students.

I feel like, our kids of Color definitely get overlooked when it comes to the advanced classes...they get overlooked because maybe they have one or two behavior issues. It's like, um, "yeah, you're good at reading, math and writing, but every time you go outside for recess, you're cutting up."

- Latrina Hoepner

All students have a right to be comfortable while they learn. Whether that be how they sit, dress, speak, or even look. So it's definitely something that goes on in the schools and I think that it's not just with physical appearance or abilities, but with mental ability, and financial background as well. People of Color, and people with disabilities, are just getting overlooked because society and sometimes even our own communities have already decided how we will be anyway—and it's hard to prove different.

- Latrina Hoepner



[Graphic image description: A group of diverse children. One child is left out from the group. There are dark purple swirls around the child to represent sadness and confusion.]

Race- and Dis/Ability-based Physical and Psychological Segregation: One of the things that Latrina shared is how she and her son, Isaiah, experience both race- and dis/ability-based structural and psychological segregation, due to the Isaiah's disability status. Latrina's desires and dreams for her son, and all children with disabilities, is full inclusion no matter the severity of the disability.

For one, with kids with a disability, it is a big, big must that they feel included in everything...being able to walk into the school was our problem...Because my son wears a prosthetic, we weren't able to get inside the building, so it became a habit for us just to show up late so we could get into the school.

- Latrina Hoepner



[Graphic image description: A door with steps in front of it. There is a child sitting in front of the door in a blue wheelchair. They have a frown on their face.]

Discipline is Not Created Equally Along Race and Dis/Ability: How Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color are disciplined at a disproportionate rate are connected to the school to prison nexus (Annamma, 2017). What Latrina shared illuminates for us the ongoing disproportionate problem of discipline for students of Color in the United States. How teachers, administrators, and staff police the spirits, bodies, minds, and souls of Black and Brown students is unfair and inequitable to the well-being, academic, social, and emotional development of students.

...huge gap of discipline that goes on with our African American kids and Brown kids versus our Caucasian kids with being suspended, getting sent to the principal's office, getting referrals, and things like that...Why is our discipline rate like that?

- Latrina Hoepner

[Graphic image description: An angry-looking adult figure is yelling at a young dark skinned student with textured hair. The student is receiving a pink slip of paper with lots of writing on it, representing an office referral.]



The Need for DisCrit to be Used in Administrative Practices and Policies for Systemic Change Efforts:

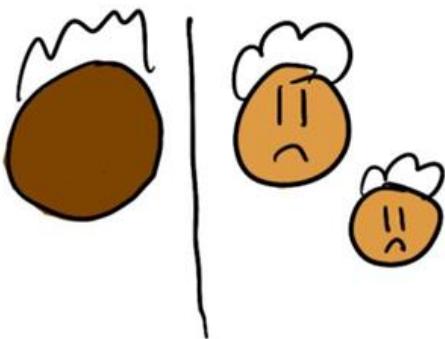
The yearning for quality educational systems that are built on common understandings and humane interactions that guarantee all families, but historically multiply-marginalized youth and families in particular, is the legacy of legislative history that must be put into action today. We have a legal precedence that must enable teachers, staff, and administration to build positive and inclusive relationships with those who are most marginalized.

Administrators should be accommodating. And it was hard to get that. I don't believe we got a handicap sign for him outside of [School Name¹] until he was ready to go. And by the end, it didn't matter, because he got his leg to walk into the building by the end, and so it was too late.

- Latrina Hoepner

It's really hard to get a hold of administrators. Whether through phone or e-mail, or whatever you're trying to do there, they're hard people to get a hold of. So, having a way for parents to contact them better and knowing who they are would be great.

- Latrina Hoepner



[Graphic image description: A teacher behind a solid line. On the other side of the line is an adult figure and their small child. The adult and child are frowning.]

¹Name of school omitted for anonymity.

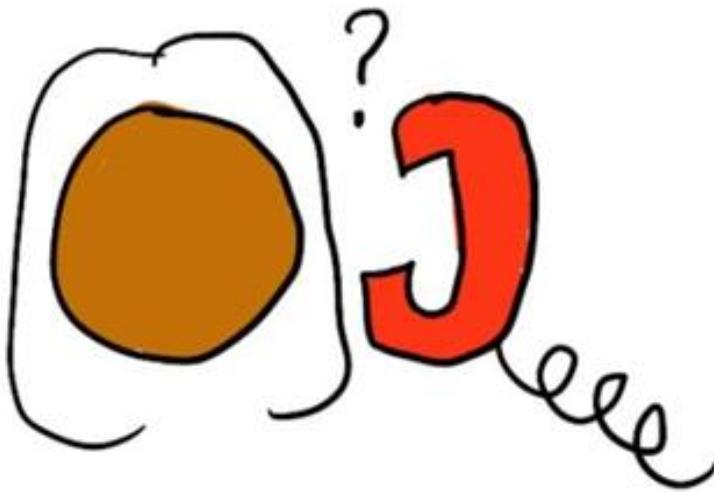
The Importance of Communicative and Non-Violent Practices: This theme underscores the importance of all teachers and stakeholders having positive, inclusive, and non-violent practices. There needs to be a shift towards anti-racist, anti-ableist, communicative acts, with and along side their students, especially BIPOC youth with and without dis/abilities. Race and disability microaggressions are endemic in U.S. society, but particularly in educational contexts, and must be addressed in order to guarantee the civil and educational rights of BIPOC students and their caregivers.

I've had comments made to me by teachers like "I didn't know he had a father. I didn't know you were in his life."

- Reverend Clifton Jenes

These teachers don't respond to emails, these teachers don't respond to the phone calls.

- Reverend Clifton Jenes



[Graphic image description: An adult with light brown skin near a red telephone. The telephone has a cord attached. There is a question mark near the person's head to represent confusion.]

The Lack of Follow Through and Systems of Support: Rev. Clifton is calling for us all to be intentional about how we treat one another and are present with each other to meet each other's needs and provide quality interactions. Rev. Clifton, similar to Latrina seeks a truly inclusive educational system that honors each of their humanity and their children's civil and educational rights.

It's hard to feel supported, or even know what support looks like, when you know they look at you in a type of way, or you already assume "Oh he's a Black child. [His] father is not in his life."

- Reverend Clifton Jenes

They make these promises like, "We'll give you a call back..." [The] [f]irst thing support looks like is being able to have a conversation about your own child.

- Reverend Clifton Jenes

[Graphic image description: A small child with dark skin and textured hair. They are frowning in sadness.]



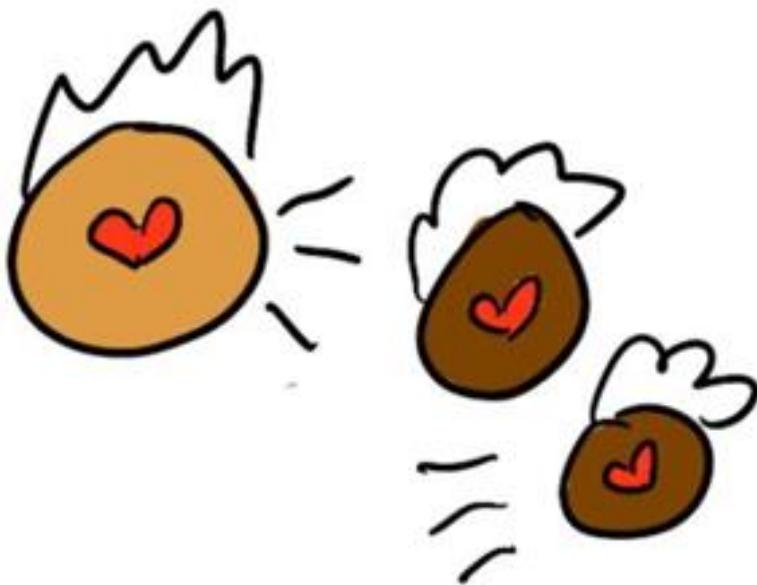
Valuing and Respecting Black Children's Humanity and Gifts in Education: Rev. Clifton's reflections and responses rang true to the spirit of W.E.B. Du Bois' (1903) gift theory and the need to humanize, value, and respect Black children in education. As mentioned before, a DisCrit Classroom Ecology would benefit all educational systems to realize Rev. Clifton's dream of inclusive education.

A lot of different cultures, a lot of different religious backgrounds, and I think when you [say] inclusive I think people, especially children... recognizing our children's gifts on the outside, not necessarily on the inside...how do we really recognize our children...?

- Reverend Clifton Jenes

To support you as a teacher with my child, you know what can I do to help you...to make everybody's experience great, and just create a relationship...that's very important to me... [Teachers] need to check themselves or maybe not assume or stereotype...Black children"

- Reverend Clifton Jenes



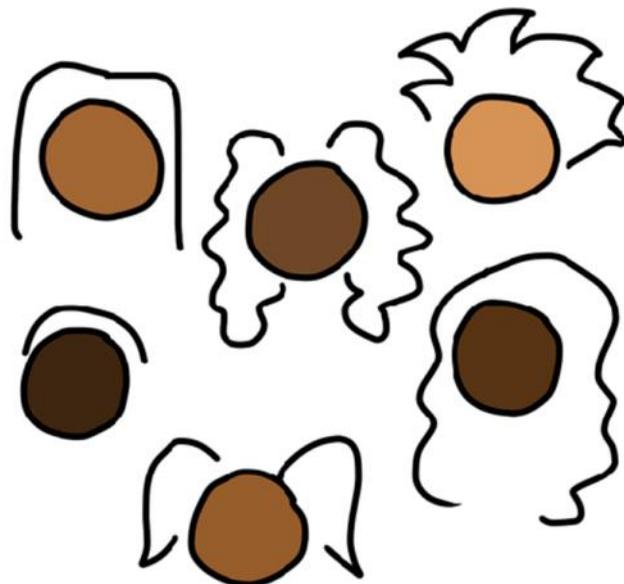
[Graphic image description: Two adults and one child. One adult represents a teacher, and the other adult represents a parent/caregiver and their child. They are speaking to each other. Each person has a red heart on their face.]

Concluding Thoughts & Feelings

This zine represents a large community project done with the collaboration of Waterloo's NAACP Education Chapter, ASK (Access for Special Kids) Resource Center, community members, caregivers, college students, and faculty. The importance of this zine was to highlight the work from town hall meetings and caregiver interviews, but also show illustrations specifically created to add more depth to these true experiences.

This zine also shows the importance of the fight for social justice in special education for students of Color, through sharing real experiences and centering the voices of the caregivers who advocate for their students. With everything that was bravely shared, we were able to identify DisCrit, disproportionality, and punishment that was caused by traumatic situations for children. Intersectionality was also identified and highlighted to explain the impact of the nexus of factors such as having a dis/ability or lower socioeconomic status, and being able to identify what this means in the K-12 education.

Overall, this zine highlights the urgency of the need of culturally responsive and sustaining educators for our children and youth of Color, with or without dis/abilities. It is our hope that current and future educators are able to learn and create change from this body of work.



[Graphic image description: Black and Brown people with diverse hairstyles.]

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About the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center

The mission of the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center is to ensure equity in student access to and participation in high quality, research-based education by expanding states' and school systems' capacity to provide robust, effective opportunities to learn for all students, regardless of and responsive to race, sex, and national origin, and to reduce disparities in educational outcomes among and between groups. The Equity by Design briefs series is intended to provide vital background information and action steps to support educators and other equity advocates as they work to create positive educational environments for all children. For more information, visit <http://www.greatlakesequity.org>.

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