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ABSTRACT

This paper uses case studies of culturally diverse exceptional learners to illustrate the impact of teacher expectations on the "accuracy" or "inaccuracy" of student self-concepts. In addition, innovative techniques that reduce stereotypic labels and enhance "accurate" self-concepts are discussed. Critical issues in teacher expectation are identified, including the use of traditional means of assessment for labeling and referring students to special education. Ten cases are briefly analyzed that illustrate misidentification of emotional disturbance, the fact that even minority teachers and principals can be uncaring, the need for school systems to find new ways of gathering and disseminating information to reduce the impact of "labels," and the weakness of schools in dealing with at-risk factors that confront students. Teachers are urged to value diversity, use a wide variety of assessment instruments and methods, and document student behaviors. Fifteen principles to reduce stereotypic labels and foster realistic expectations are listed, such as "there is no perfect human being" and "a problem behavior is not always a disordered behavior." (Contains 37 references.) (DB)

Teacher Expectations of Multicultural Exceptional Learners:

Impact on "Accuracy" of Self-Concepts

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Abstract

Culturally diverse exceptional learners confront multidimensional problems in schools and communities. One of such problems is the issue of teacher expectation. Current laws require general and special educators to identify, assess, place, and instruct their students in a manner that does not label them or destroy their self-concepts. Ironically, these processes are loaded with presumptions and expectations that in themselves lead to discriminatory generalizations and illusory conclusions. The key question is, How can general and special educators reduce labels generated by unrealistic expectations and encourage productivity of culturally diverse learners? In this paper, I respond to this critical question using pertinent cases that reveal the impact of teacher expectations on the "accuracy" or "inaccuracy" of self-concepts of multicultural exceptional learners. In addition, I discuss innovative techniques that reduce stereotypic labels and enhance "accurate" self-concepts.

Teacher Expectations of Multicultural Exceptional Learners: Impact on "Accuracy" of Self-Concepts.

Multicultural exceptional learners confront multidimensional problems in school and community programs (Ford, Obiakor, & Patton, 1995; Garcia, 1994). These problems include the "inaccurate" perception of their self-concepts and unrealistic expectations of them by their teachers (Obiakor, 1994, 1995, 1996; Obiakor & Schwenn, 1995, 1996). In their classical work about three decades ago, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) found that a positive relationship exists between teacher expectation, differential treatment, and student self-fulfilling prophecy. In spite of the controversy generated by their findings, Brophy and Good (1974), and Proctor (1984) made similar discoveries. For instance, Proctor confirmed that "low expectations are generally associated with minority group membership, low SES (socio-economic status), male gender, nonconformity personality, physical unattractiveness, nonstandard speech patterns, and low achievement" (p. 122).

Based on Proctor's (1984) assertion, critical issues that affect minority populations in general and special education programs are directly or indirectly linked to teacher expectations. For example, minority students continue to be over represented in special education programs and under represented in gifted programs (Artiles & Trent, 1994); and majority of these students continue to be labeled as incapable students and trouble makers who have "low" or "negative" self-concepts (Ford & Obiakor, 1995). Obiakor and Schwenn (1995, 1996) agreed that looking at a multicultural student's self-concept from a traditional perspective (i.e., that self-concept is an interrelated perception of the self) leads to unwarranted teacher expectations, perceptual assumptions, and negative labels. They stated that teachers tend to make idiosyncratic judgments

on students' school and life successes and failures.

There is tremendous data to suggest that the inability of a multicultural exceptional learner to perform to an expected level in a task or learn from a particular teacher does not necessarily mean that he/she cannot excel in another task or learn from another teacher (Ford et al., 1995; Hilliard, 1995). His/her presumed "low" academic self-concept because of poor academic performance on a subject matter is prejudicial and counter-productive to special educational programming. Such presumption can be "accurate" or "inaccurate" when self-concept is viewed as a self-descriptive behavior that can be observed, measured, explained, quantified, area-specific, and situation-specific (Obiakor, 1994, 1996; Obiakor, Algozzine, & Campbell-Whatley, 1997; Obiakor & Schwenn, 1995; Obiakor & Stile, 1994). With demographic changes and predicted shifts in power and paradigms, general and special educators must confront the critical issue of teacher expectation as they explore innovative ways to enhance self-concepts and maximize the potential of multicultural exceptional learners. The key question is, How can general and special educators reduce labels generated by unrealistic expectations and encourage productivity of culturally diverse learners? This paper responds to this critical question using pertinent cases that reveal the impact of teacher expectations on the "accuracy" or "inaccuracy" of self-concepts of multicultural exceptional learners. In addition, innovative techniques that reduce stereotypic labels and enhance "accurate" self-concepts are discussed.

Critical Issues on Teacher Expectation

In today's general and special education programs, students who behave, look, speak, and learn differently are at-risk of misidentification, misassessment, misclassification, misplacement, and misinstruction due to teacher expectations (Ford et al., 1995; Obiakor, 1994; Obiakor &

Algozzine, 1995; Obiakor, Mehring, & Schwenn, 1997; Obiakor & Schwenn, 1996). When teachers fail to respond to intra-individual and inter-individual differences, processes of identification, assessment, classification, placement, and instruction become loaded with inappropriate assumptions, negative stereotypes, and illusory conclusions. In other words, the traditional ways teachers gather and disseminate information about multicultural learners for decision making have problems addressing the inevitable concepts of intra-individual and inter-individual differences. Methods of getting such information include student interview, parent interview, student observation, academic records, health records, attendance records, and discipline records, yet educators continue to honor traditional methods that have consistently created labels and categories (Midgette, 1995).

The enactment of the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act (Public Law 94-142) in 1975 made it mandatory to infuse nondiscriminatory information gathering and dissemination in all aspects of special education. Its reauthorization in 1990 as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Public Law 101-476) and the later amendment of IDEA in 1997 (Public Law 105-17) provided further mandates for nondiscriminatory disciplinary techniques of all learners with exceptionalities. While many scholars and educators do not object to information gathering and dissemination of students' strengths and weaknesses, they decry the use of such information in classifying and labeling students because they look, behave, speak, and learn differently (Duvall, 1994; Gould, 1981; Hilliard, 1995; Obiakor, 1994; Perrone, 1977; Samuda & Lewis, 1992).

For multicultural students, the methods of behavioral assessment remain critical (Karr & Wright, 1995). The information that applies to one student in one setting may not apply to

him/her in another setting, and even when such information is correct, it cannot be generalized to suit all students. Additionally, what works for one teacher/professional may not work for another teacher/professional (Obiakor & Schwenn, 1996). To achieve the goal of responding to individual differences, a teacher/professional may decide to use one or more techniques for gathering information. For example, he/she may decide to use naturalistic observation, structured situation assessment, interviews, questionnaires, self-monitoring, and open-form tools (Karr & Wright, 1995; Mehring, 1996; Midgette, 1995; Obiakor, 1990; Obiakor & Algozzine, 1995). In spite of the preferred technique, resultant labels that follow have devastating effects on students. In a nutshell, general and special educators must stop assigning worth to multicultural students by measuring intelligence as a single entity. As an example, traditional instruments that measure self-concepts quantify observed self-descriptive behaviors in terms of positiveness. Interestingly, those self-descriptive behaviors that reflect the social ideals of the dominant society are scored as positive and those that are at odds are scored as negative (Obiakor, Stile, & Muller, 1994). To this end, interpretative difficulties and more labels are generated creating more adjustment problems for multicultural exceptional learners.

There are apparent disadvantages in globalizing behaviors that multicultural students exhibit and in wrongfully interpreting their capabilities. These misinterpretations by professionals might be internalized by students who behave, look, speak, and learn differently. As a result, self-fulfilling behaviors are ingrained in students (Obiakor et al., 1997a, 1997b; Webb-Johnson, Obiakor, & Algozzine, 1995). The irony is that some multicultural students have rough times in classrooms, schools, and homes where their devaluation has led to self-defeating behaviors. Parents give up on them, classmates do not get along with them, and teachers attempt to get rid

of them. It becomes necessary to establish support mechanisms and divergent techniques to work with these students. The programmatic goal should not be to label or get rid of students -- the goal continues to be to provide education in least restrictive environments. More than a decade ago, DeBruyn (1984) warned that:

> If we adopt a "get rid" of attitude, we violate a basic tenet of education: that each student is an individual, and that our instruction and curriculum must try to make allowances for individual differences. Regardless of our feelings, we cannot discount this tenet. That's why it is dangerous to adopt a practice that amounts to saying, 'Get the uninterested, unmotivated, and ill-behaved out of the school to keep them from interfering with those who want to learn.' In truth, this is an easy way out. And teaching all students is not easy. Yet, it remains our challenge. (p.1)

Relevant Cases on Teacher Expectation

Students respond positively or negatively to their environmental stimuli (e.g., parents, peers, teachers, and paraprofessionals). Some stimuli are productive while others are destructive. In general and special education, the ways students are identified or the expectations placed on them can have positive or negative influence. As Proctor (1984) pointed out, "low-expectation students in general receive fewer opportunities to learn, spend less time on instruction-related activities, and receive less curricular content (or receive contact that has been 'diluted')"(p.123). Consider the following cases (Obiakor & Okafor, 1997):

Case #1: Emilia was a 14-year-old immigrant from Mexico. She had only been in the United States for three months. She was experiencing some difficulties with the English language

while trying to adjust to the American culture. She was new and had not made friends in the school. She did not want to sound different, therefore, she did not participate in class. She was shy and isolated herself from her peers. She rarely participated in class and seemed to have trouble getting started with her classwork. Her teacher acknowledged that she was very respectful and polite and tried several times to engage her in conversation but she said very little each time. It was six weeks into the school year and her teacher was not able to get much information from her. She was very concerned that she failed to adjust well in school activities. Her teacher recommended that she be tested for attention deficit disorder and/or emotional disturbance.

Case #2: Teacher A was a White female who had been teaching for many years. Because of her years of experience she was assigned to teach a particular class. She did not quite get along with one African-American male in her class. On one occasion, this student came late to class. He was wearing a pink shirt. Teacher A made fun of his pink shirt; and he got upset because his masculinity was challenged. He asked: "Teach, are you crazy? You didn't get enough last night?" Teacher A could not handle the insult and reported the student to the principal who did not hesitate to suspend him. She spent time in the teachers' lounge talking about the student's behavior and the kind of home he came from.

Case #3: A university supervisor visited an inner-city high school to observe his student-teacher. In his conversation with the cooperating teacher (a White male), he told him that his students were "poor" and that many of them were drug dealers who would either not succeed in life or would die before they became adults. When he asked the cooperative teacher about solutions to help them, he laughed and indicated that it was difficult to "flog a dead horse."

Case #4: A university supervisor visited a student-teacher in a resource room in one of the inner-city elementary schools. The cooperating teacher was an African American female with an educational specialist (Ed.S) degree in special education. During his conversation with her, she proceeded to tell him that many of her students were criminals. She particularly pointed out that one of her students was a criminal. She told the university supervisor that the student had broken into cars several times and that the student's mother was a prostitute. When he asked why she was telling him this awful story she noted that everybody knew.

Case #5: A university supervisor visited an inner-city elementary school to continue his program, Project Self-Responsibility, which he initiated to help retain and graduate African American students. The principal (an African American male) was very nonchalant. He explained that the reasons for his skepticism were (a) these students were jail-birds who came from "poor" homes, and (b) these students' parents did not have jobs. In their conversation, he indicated that these students were beyond redemption.

Case #6: Delvin was a 12-year-old Native American boy of average intelligence and performed at his grade level. He was very mechanical and enjoyed taking things apart and putting the pieces together. He wanted to be an automobile mechanic when he finished high school. His family was financially poor. He wore worn and dirty clothes. He appeared sick and tired most o the time and often slept in class. He did not get along well with his peers because they ridiculed and called him derogatory names. His teacher was worried that he snapped easily and lost control. For this reason, he wanted him to be tested for emotional disturbance.

Case #7: William was a 10-year-old Hispanic American boy. He was very big for his age and was always aware of his physical appearance and size. He had difficulty focusing on his tasks

and rarely completed his assignments but always wanted to help others. Although he tried to be nice and friendly to his peers, they did not always accept him, and this made him very upset. His teacher wrote a note to the counselor requesting for a conference with him and the counselor. According to the teacher, "William appears not to understand simple directions. He wonders in and out of the classroom and constantly does annoying things. Whatever is happening to him is beyond his control and he might need professional help."

Case #8: Jason was a 10-year-old Asian American boy. His attendance had been very regular and he made good grades in his classes. He was very sociable and got along well with his peers. His demeanor began to change, and he became frequently angry and resentful. He lost his temper easily and often argued with his teacher. He got frustrated with the teacher when she tried to talk to him and sometimes he was rebellious. She came to the counselor and reported, "I am worried about Jason. He argues over anything I say to him, even things that will help him. We are constantly fighting over issues. I believe he is emotionally disturbed." The counselor tried to contact Jason's parents and discovered that they were going through a divorce. They were engaged in an ugly court battle over the children and their properties. There was no peace at home and Jason was considering running away.

Case #9: Demarcus was a 12th grade African American student. He had been taking TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) since his 10th grade. He had taken it six different times but had not passed. His mother went to the counselor and said, "I have tried everything. He is slow and cannot read, and cannot get his diploma until he passes TAAS." His mother wanted to know if there was anything the counselor could do to help him graduate at the end of the year because he needed to move on with his life. She also informed the counselor that she had

been advised by her friend that if Demarcus was placed in a special education program, he would not be required to pass TAAS before getting his Diploma. She, therefore, wanted to know if the counselor could just change Demarcus' placement to special education.

Case #10: Paula was an attractive young Hispanic American girl in the 10th grade. When she was in the fourth grade, she was an above average student who seemed to enjoy school. She was removed from her biological mother's home when she was 10 years old because her mother did nothing while her boyfriend was constantly abusing her. Since then, she rarely stayed in school and frequently ran away to live with her boyfriend. Her mother thought that she was out of control -- she wanted her tested for emotional disturbance and possible placement in special education.

Analyses of Cases

Case #1 reveals an immigrant minority who was trying to adjust to the educational system of the United States. This student was shy and maybe withdrawn. The critical question is, Does shyness indicate emotional disturbance? It appears that the teacher's expectation was not fulfilled, and the unlikely solution was to get rid of the student. In Case #2, the teacher's inability to work with the student resulted in the suspension for that student. It appears that the teacher's lack of valuing of cultural variables had translated into absolute negativism. Similarly, in Case #3, there appears to be a myth of socio-economic dissonance. The teacher saw the students as "dead horses" beyond redemption. This kind of expectation is consistently counter-productive to the well-being of students, teachers, parents, and communities. It leads to external locus of control and extrinsic motivation and forces all participants to blame others rather than find appropriate individualistic solutions.

Case #4 demonstrates that even teachers who come from diverse cultural backgrounds can be uncaring. The implication is that a good teacher is a good teacher despite his/her cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. It reiterates what Woodson (1933) confirmed in his book, The Mis-education of the Negro. As he noted, African Americans must be careful about internalizing European-centered education that sometimes divorces them from their communities. In Case #5, the principal who was also an African American felt that his students were beyond redemption. The intriguing question is, Why should teachers and administrators continue to be employed if schools cannot help children and youth to grow? As in Case #6, the teacher was not concerned that the student's peers ridiculed him for his poverty, however, he was quick to recommend him for testing for emotional disturbance.

Case #7 deals with a student who was said to be "nice ad friendly," but unaccepted by his peers because of his physical maturity. In a class where students did not get along with a fellow student, it was the teacher's responsibility to foster peer relationship. Rather than attempt to refer the student for counseling, the teacher should have fostered positive relationships through positive actions (e.g., letting students know that they are all valuable elements of the class; picking a "Person of the Day", a "Teacher of the Week," or a "Leader of the Month;" and allowing students to say positive things orally and in writing about their classmates). In Case #8, the teacher needed to know other variables that impinged upon the students learning -- such a knowledge should not have been used to label or categorize the student; it should have been used to reduce the stressor or crisis confronting the student.

Case #9 exposes a dangerous quagmire that confronts students all over the nation. In this situation, a mother was actually advocating that the son be placed in a special education setting to

allow her son to graduate. School systems have become "slaves" to assessment tools. While these tests sometimes produce consistent results, they consistently fail to measure what they purport to measure. It is important that school systems look for new ways of gathering and disseminating information to reduce far-reaching negative impacts of labels on students' lives. In Case #10, the weakness of schools to deal with at-risk factors that confront students is revealed. If stressors can have devastating effects on adults, similar effects can be expected on children and youth. The teacher's prescription of tests for emotional disturbance showed the teacher's inability to work with the student who was at-risk of dropping out of school.

Impact of Teacher Expectations on "Accuracy" of Self-Concepts

The cases discussed above demonstrate how tradition conflicts with reality. What one individual may call tradition may constitute real problems for another individual. When a person or group of people is viewed as "poor" and/or "deprived," it shows an inability to confront real problems of real people. Educators cannot assume that members of minority groups cannot learn and at the same time expect them to perform academic, social and economic miracles. For instance, Barker (1993) decried the continuous denigration of African Americans in school and societal programs. She wrote:

> The peculiarity exists that youth internalize or define others' actions toward them as factual information and interpretations about themselves rather than as social interactions or as explications that may not be valid. Their acceptance of this information is based upon the perceived influence and status of the individual rendering such information. Therefore when the Black child's environment labels him as expendable or superfluous, and then responds to him as such, the internalization of these messages has long lasting

and severe consequences. (p. 172)

These cases also project attempts (by error or design) to deflate self-concepts of individual students. The dangerous response has been for minority group members to internalize these negative actions rather than demonstrate through performance and outcomes that they are capable. As stated earlier, the result is that everyone blames everyone without self-responsibility.

Teachers are sometimes unaware of the positive or negative impact of their perceptions and expectations. In most school programs, students liked by their teachers are frequently assumed to have "high" or "positive" self-concepts, and when they are not liked, they are assumed to have "low" or "negative" self-concepts. Time and time again, some educators and service providers have indicated that "by the time a child reaches school age his self-concept is well formed and his reactions to learning, to school failure and success and to physical, social and emotional climate of the classroom will be determined by the beliefs and attitudes he has about himself" (Canfied & Wells, 1976, p. 3). This supposition indicates that a change in self-concept is likely to affect a wide range of behaviors (Canfield & Siccone, 1993; Canfield & Wells, 1994). When one aspect of the child's self-concepts is affected, there is a supposed "domino effect" on his/her entire self-concept. Applying this model of self-concept in the classroom will require the involvement with the minority student's school and home life. Such a practice will place the teacher in a rather precarious position of encouraging classroom discussion on aspects of the child's life which are outside the primary domain of the school's delegated responsibility. Moreover, this practice might encourage student labeling or categorization and might hamper classroom learning and/or functional learning outcomes. It becomes educationally unproductive to use this conceptualization of self-concept in regular, special, or inclusive classrooms, especially

in designing IEPs for minority students with exceptionalities (Obiakor, 1995, 1996).

As a consequence, teachers must interpret self-concept of all students with caution. Very often, traditional tests measure what is positive according to the social ideal of the dominant society (Obiakor, Stile, & Muller, 1994). General and special educators must know the importance of self-concept of these students in terms that can be described, observed, and explained. Self-concept must be viewed as a self-descriptive behavior; and like all self-descriptive behaviors, it can be measured. Before trying to build self-concepts, educators must first understand its changing nature, and its potential to be "accurate" or "inaccurate," convert or overt, and different from one situation to the next. Self-concept measurement, then, ought to take place in a context similar to that in which the results will be used. Because self-concept is not genetically predetermined, educators must make sure that their interactions with students are rewarding.

Fostering Realistic Expectations in General and Special Education

Schools and homes have been proven to be important elements of a child's growth. Proctor (1984) confirmed that "teachers are less apt to direct instruction to low-expectation students, are less likely to tolerate nonattending behavior on the part of such students, and tend to place fewer demands on them for classroom performance, homework assignments, and overall academic effort" (p. 123). He added that "when learning climate differs for individuals and groups within a school, patterns of differential expectations will emerge, with differential outcomes in student achievement" (p. 126). A logical extension is that general and special educators must be careful about how they identify students in their respective classrooms. They cannot replace appropriate teacher-related behaviors with control-related behaviors meant for

restricted institutions and environments. The ways they gather and disseminate information about students to parents and colleagues must be revisited. Efforts to label students or get rid of them because they behave, look, speak, and learn differently demonstrate gross incompetence on the part of professionals.

A few years ago, Lake (1990) wrote a letter titled, "An Indian Father's Plea" to the teacher of his son (named Wind-Wolf) regarding school expectations. According to him, "my son, Wind-Wolf, is not an empty glass coming into your class to be filled. He is a full basket coming into a different environment and society with something special to share. Please let him share his knowledge, heritage, and culture with you and his peers" (p. 53). This is (and should be) the plea of most parents of minority children in schools and programs. To reduce labels and illusory conclusions and enhance "accuracy" of self-concepts, general and special educators must expect their students to be individuals with divergent capabilities and intelligences. Gardner (1993) was correct when he wrote:

> It is of utmost importance that we recognize and nurture all of the varied human intelligences, and all of the combinations of intelligences. If we recognize this, I think we will have at least a better chance of dealing appropriately with the many problems that we face in the world. If we can mobilize the spectrum of human abilities, not only will people feel better about themselves and more competent; it is even possible that they also feel more engaged and better able to join the rest of the world community in working for the broader good. Perhaps if we can mobilize the full range of human intelligences and ally them to an ethical sense, we can help to increase the livelihood of our survival on this planet, and perhaps even

contribute to our thinking. (p.12)

It is imperative that general and special educators reduce differential and/or prejudicial expectations of students who behave, look, speak, and learn differently by using a wide range of instruments, measures, and methods. Students' behaviors must be documented in a variety of learning situations to avoid labels and illusory conclusions. Documentations must include (a) anecdotal records, (b) work samples, (c) audio cassettes, (d) video tapes, (e) photography, (f) student journals, (g) student-kept charts, (h) sociogram, (e) informal tests, (j) informal use of standardized tests, (k) student interviews, (l) criterion-referenced assessments, (m) classroom maps, and (n) calendar records (Karr & Wright, 1995; Mehring, 1996). As Karr and Wright (1995) pointed out:

> To meet the challenges of the 21st century, assessment cannot focus only on identification and placement of persons in special education programs. The primary focus of assessment must be to facilitate problem solving. Hence, the assessment process of persons with behavioral problems must focus on collecting and synthesizing information about a problem -- For persons with behavior problems the multidisciplinary team must use only reliable and valid assessment procedures to ensure ecologically valid assessment. Because of each person's uniqueness, assessment procedures will vary from person to person. (p.88)

General and special education programs must be aimed at enhancing "accurate" self-concepts of students, especially those who are at-risk of misidentification, misassessment, misplacement, and misinstruction. They must also expect these students to succeed. Following are teacher beliefs that can reduce stereotypic labels, foster realistic expectations, and enhance

"accurate" self-concepts.

1. There is no perfect human-being.
2. Human beings differ intra-individually (within themselves) and inter-individually (between themselves).
3. A person's environment contributes to his/her growth and development, and this environment can be positively manipulated.
4. Because of human differences, our assessment and intervention techniques must be multidimensional.
5. Behavior problems do not occur in isolation -- they are based on our personal idiosyncracies.
6. A problem behavior is not always a disordered behavior.
7. What is a disordered behavior to one teacher/professional might not be a disordered behavior to another teacher/professional.
8. A behavior is a disordered behavior when (a) it departs from acceptable standards considering age, culture, situation, circumstance, and time, (b) its frequency is well-documented, and (c) its duration is well-documented.
9. Even when a behavior is disordered, the person exhibiting that behavior is not disordered or disturbed.
10. Assessment/intervention techniques that work for one student might not work for another student.
11. Two testers/assessors/diagnosticians might test one student and get different results.

12. The ways tests are conducted and interpreted can have far-reaching effects on learners.

13. We "put the devil" in students when we try so hard to "flog the devil" out of them -- we create problem behaviors when we solve problems that do not exist (i.e., iatrogenic intervention).

14. Collaboration, consultation, and cooperation can make behavioral and academic assessment more meaningful to students, parents, and educators.

15. It takes a whole village to raise a child -- this comprehensive support model (CSM) incorporates the student, family, school, community, and government. No part of the village should be excluded in behavioral and academic assessment/intervention.

Conclusion

In this paper, I addressed the impact of teacher expectations on minority learners with special needs in general and special education. I am very convinced that when observation, identification, and assessment fail to respond to intra-individual and inter-individual differences, classification, placement, and instruction seem to be loaded with negative assumptions, denigrating stereotypes, and illusory conclusions. The information we have about students must be multidimensional to address individual differences and build self-concepts. The goal of general and special education must be to maximize the fullest potential of students who look, behave, learn, and speak differently. For behavioral assessments to be useful, students' capabilities must be appropriately identified. Like other learners, minority students come to school with unique strengths and weaknesses. As we prepare them for life, we must avoid labels, categories, and

prejudicial conclusions. In the words of Brooks (1991):

> While all students deserve to have their islands of competence displayed and built upon, there is a more urgent need to do so for those students who lack confidence in their ability to learn. If we can reinforce the areas of strength these students possess, my experience has been that we can open the way for a "ripple effect," where students may be willing to venture forth and confront tasks that have been problematic for them. (p.32)

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