

Creative Works

“Can't C Me.”

Shawn Robinson, Ph.D.

Keywords: learning disability, poetry, identity

“The stares of a million pairs of eyes and you'll never realize you can't C Me...” Lesane Parish Crooks.

I contextualize my poetry by using the lyrics of the song “Can't C Me” written by Lesane Parish Crooks. As a Black male with a learning disability (i.e., dyslexia), I was warehoused in an educational system that has been designed to segregate and incriminate instead of emancipate or educate (Blanchett, 2010; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Hoyles & Hoyles, 2010). Between third and twelfth grade, I not only felt segregated as a student in special education, but was also left academically behind (Robinson, 2014; 2013). The majority of my educational journey, I felt hopeless about obtaining a bright future because I couldn't read, and had low self-esteem (Robinson, 2015a; Burden, 2005; Wang & Neihart, 2015). Further, my voice was silenced as a Black male who had been identified with multiple labels, and written off (Connor, 2006, 2005; Ferri & Connor, 2014; Gillborn, 2015). To date, there are scholars who examine the intersectionality of race, disability and giftedness (Barnard-Brak, Johnsen, Hannig, & Wei, 2015); however, the voices of Black males living at the intersection of dyslexia and giftedness, and how they understand their position in the education system are nonexistent in those scholarly reviews (Petersen, 2006; Robinson, 2016a). A major factor of their voices being absent is that there are some teachers who frame students' academic potential from a ‘deficit’ perspective (Robinson, 2016b). Therefore, this poetic account will serve two purposes: (1) shatter all notions that Black males with dyslexia in special education can't succeed academically, and (2) offer an inside perspective of how it feels knowing that there are a million pairs of eyes staring at me, but some teachers “Can't C Me.”

Poem: “Can't C Me.”

Imagine the pain of being constrained because of your ethnicity;

Only to be seen as an “other” and treated like a Black southerner;

In an all-White community, being a Black male in special ed. gave some teachers an anxiety attack;

Much of my educational journey was spent receiving restrictions, and crucifixion, and receiving a conviction of being illiterate;

Most of my programming was behavior based, because many teachers

didn't see me as savior;

I was segregated, and academically unmotivated;

My anger of not knowing how to read, misled many teachers belief in my ability, and caused me much grief;

This left me dreaming, and screaming;

My roars were loud as a dinosaurs, and could be heard across four generations of war;

During my entire K-12 journey, administrators called more strikes against my inability to perform, rather than questioning the teacher's ability to help me transform;

There I sat, a Black male in special ed. who lost it;

My hopes shattered;

I ended up in an alternative high school because I kept getting suspended;

Still unable to read, I fought with many teachers, and was still a second thought;

My reading disability went unnoticed, which left me ineligible for college;

Most teachers told me I wouldn't succeed;

I was told college wasn't an option by many teachers who also questioned my knowledge;

Yet, I met a college professor who acknowledged my frustration, and said my anger was the result of misidentification;

He accepted me into college (and I eventually became his successor);

Finally, I graduated high school reading at an elementary level;

Six years later, I received my bachelors;

Five years after, I earned my Masters, and felt like a scoutmaster;

Seven years later, I received my Doctorate in Language and Literacy, became my professor's successor, and now working my way to become an assistant professor.

In summary, throughout my K-12 journey I had a million pairs of eyes staring at me, but my potential (i.e., giftedness) went unnoticed as some teachers "Can't C Me" because of my "otherness" and the associated stigma (Robinson, 2015a; Yosso, 2005). Yet, as a former

special education student, I shattered all notion that Black males with dyslexia within the PK-20 system can't academically succeed (Robinson, 2016). Furthermore, it is my moral obligation to not only help Black males in special education learn to read, and received appropriate language and literacy curriculum, but also recognize their gifts so they do not experience teachers "Can't C Me" mentalities (Robinson, 2015b).

Dr. Shawn Anthony Robinson is an independent scholar and dyslexia consultant. His research focuses on the intersection of giftedness and dyslexia, and writes about gifted Black males with dyslexia. He brings a wealth of academic experience, training and knowledge about the psychological development of dyslexia. Dr. Robinson has written peer-review articles that discuss African American males with dyslexia, which is an understudied area of scholarship. Dr. Robinson attended an alternative school, graduated high school reading at an elementary level, and understands the hardship of not being properly identity, written off, and placed into special education without proper academic services. He created the Triple Identity Theory, which is a comprehensive model to understand gifted Black males with dyslexia. Dr. Robinson's research has been highlighted in [NBC News](#) in an article titled "This Man is Searching For a Link Between Illiteracy and Racial Bias."

References

- Barnard-Brak, L., Johnsen, S. K., Pond Hannig, A., & Wei, T. (2015). The Incidence of Potentially Gifted Students Within a Special Education Population. *Roeper Review*, 37(2), 74-83.
- Blanchett, J. W. (2010). Telling like it is: The role of race, class, & culture in the perpetuation of learning disability as a privileged category for the white middle class. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 30(2).
- Burden, R. (2005). *Dyslexia & self-concept: Seeking a dyslexic identity*. Philadelphia, PA: Whurr Publishers.
- Connor, D. (2006). Michael's Story: "I get into so much trouble just by walking": Narrative Knowing and Life at the Intersections of Learning Disability, Race, and Class. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 39(2): 154-165.
- Connor, D.J. & Ferri, B.A. (2005). Integration and inclusion --A troubling nexus: Race, disability, and special education. *The Journal of African American History*. 90(1&2), 107-127.
- Crooks, P. L. (1996). Can't C Me. <http://genius.com/2pac-cant-c-me-lyrics>
- Ferri, B. A., & Connor, D. (2005). In the Shadow of *Brown*: Special education and overrepresentation of students of color. *Remedial and Special Education*, 26(2), 93-100.

- Ferri, B.A. & Connor, D.J. (2014). Talking (& not talking) about race, social class, & dis/ability: Toward a margin-to-margin approach. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 17(4), 471-493.
- Gillborn, D. (2015). Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and the Primacy of Racism: Race, Class, Gender, and Disability in Education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 21(3), 277-287.
- Hoyles, A. & Hoyles, M. (2010) Race and dyslexia. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 13(2), 209-223.
- Petersen, A. (2006). An African-American woman with disabilities: the intersection of gender, race and disability. *Disability & Society*, 21(7), 721-734.
- Robinson, S. A. (2016b). Remediating the Learning Disabilities of Black Males: Implications for PK–12 Teaching. *Journal of Education and Development in the Caribbean*, 15(1), 159-173.
- Robinson, S. A. (2016a). Triple Identity Theory: A theoretical framework for understanding gifted Black males with dyslexia. *Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals*, 41(1), 147-158.
- Robinson, S. A. (2015a). Overcoming dyslexia with fortitude: One man's journey for an education. *Wisconsin English Journal*, 57(2), 36-48.
- Robinson S. A. (2015b). Navigating The Academic Systems Through Three Perspectives: A Twice Exceptional, Black Male, with Dyslexia. An autoethnographic account (Doctoral Dissertation). LC 4818.38.R63. Milwaukee, WI: Cardinal Stritch University.
- Robinson, S. A. (2014). Black males with dyslexia in Wisconsin getting left behind: Recommendations for academic attainment. *Wisconsin English Journal*, 56(2), 55-67.
- Robinson, S. A. (2013). Educating Black males with dyslexia. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 3(3), 159-174.
- Wang, C. W., & Neihart, M. (2015). Academic Self-Concept and Academic Self-Efficacy: Self-Beliefs Enable Academic Achievement of Twice-Exceptional Students. *Roeper Review*, 37(2), 63-73.
- Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69–91.