

December 2020

The Power of a Name: Nontraditional Names, Teacher Efficacy, and Expected Learning Outcomes

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Recommended Citation

Moore, L. L., Stewart, M. L., Slanda, D. D., Placencia, A., & Moore, M. M. (2020). The Power of a Name: Nontraditional Names, Teacher Efficacy, and Expected Learning Outcomes. *Journal of English Learner Education*. (11)1. 83-103.

Retrieved from <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/jele/vol11/iss1/5>

Introduction

“In a tolerant America, your name is no barrier to success” ~ (Barack Obama)

I learned at a very young age, people will judge and define you by your name before ever meeting you. As an impressionable child, these societal impacts made a difference in my life. I am blessed to have only been told the insightful aspirational impacts of my name during infancy and my toddler years. However, as time moved on, I entered into my early childhood, adolescence and currently as an early/young adult to realize the unaspiring impacts of my name. I have always been proud of who I am. However, earlier in my life, I was not always fond of my name due to society and situational experiences. As life went on, I embraced the uniqueness of my name and the power it possessed. Whether negative or positive, my name forced people to stop and think. I think that is powerful! In my life experiences I would often see my teachers holding their attendance logs and frantically calling out student names in a very systematic, almost song like manner. Their traditional process worked, until they came to my name, a name that caused them to pause, a name unlike any others they have rambled off in a rhetorical manner. My name forced my teachers and school leaders to focus. Having to pause and focus required them to think. Think about my name and who and/or what was behind that name, good, bad or indifferent. ~ MezNari M. Moore

This article sheds light on the challenges and controversial issues faced by individuals with uncommon or nontraditional names. Our students and families have been impacted by structural racism long before COVID-19 and face continued discrimination in today’s climate. All across the United States and internationally, students and families have been historically marginalized by systemic racism and punitive policies of practice. We explore important issues related to individual identity relating to nontraditional names, stereotypes and biases. We draw upon individual narratives and research that illuminates the historical inequities for students of color and students from diverse backgrounds based solely on their given name. As a critical part of pre-service and in-service teacher pursuits, we conclude by offering supportive suggestions and guidelines to create safe and inclusive classrooms. To create such inclusive spaces we must dismantle disruptive teacher behaviors that perpetuate historical racism and stereotypes, shifting mindsets towards solutions with the goal of transforming structures that create inequality.

From cultural-societal to parental connections, moving on to originality and ownership, the name *MezNari* was born from royalty. The name *MezNari* evolved from "Azari" (meaning mother of royalty and the father of a prince) with roots of Africa, a continent of royalty intertwined with the flourishing fictional country, Wakanda (Barnett, 2017). Inspired by West African mythology and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Africa and Wakanda diversified life, bringing together families—by lineage, education, ability, occupation, place of origin, affiliation, patronage, parentage, adoption, and even physical characteristics. *MezNari*, an African American male born into a Western world, had parents whose goals were to give him a name of power and purpose. A name with massive meaning—far beyond man's mediocre manipulation, and one that he would own, which is what the "Me" at the beginning of his name represents. This name would belong only to him and help him start his own path while always understanding the need to reflect on the past to build a successful future. The name *Sankofa*, expressed in the Akan language, is an important African American symbol that connects the African heritage and people of color, and resonates their rich, diverse culture and heritage. Much like *Sankofa*, cultural names validate individuals as well as groups.

One's Name

Often pre-established before birth, our names are unique markers of who we are. Names influence how others perceive us. According to the Social Security Administration (2018), the most popular names for children born during 2018 included girl names such as Emma (#1) and Evelyn (#10). The most popular boys' names included Liam (#1) and Logan (#10). Names in the United States are often influenced by pop culture. During the 1970s, an eight-episode miniseries, *Roots*, described the story of an 18th-century African man who was captured, brought to North America and sold as a slave to a Virginia plantation owner. During the airing of the mini-series,

thousands of newborns were named after some of the characters and actors. In 1977, some of the most popular names for African American parents were Levar (named for the actor who portrayed the main character, Levar Burton) and Kizzy, the name of the main character's daughter. In 2019, thousands of babies were named for characters from a popular TV show: Arya (2,545), Khaleesi (560), and Jaime (547).

Selecting a Name

According to the Heisenberg Principle, at the exact time something or someone is labeled, the item or individual is perceived differently (Ishikawa, 2012). A name, whether idolized or feared, can command respect; similarly, to the purpose and power to choose one's first name. Infants arrive into the world nameless. At birth, parents are positioned with the power to select his or her child's first name. First names vary from simple to complex. Mehrabian (2001) observed that baby names are often both intuitive and emotional. In a study of the possible impact of a child's first name, Mehrabian contended that no matter a family's zip code or economic status, one powerful choice that families can make is to give their children first names. This choice may serve to leverage other people's biases and beliefs about the child and their abilities. Further, first names have the power to demand or elicit respect from others at the onset of a first meeting. During a study related to names, Mehrabian identified first names that carry with them connotations of success.

Mehrabian (2001) completed seven connected studies and reviewed over 2,000 first names; the initial study in the series served as a basis for the subsequent six studies. The main findings of the first study were that names: (a) denote characteristics of ethical caring (e.g., trustworthy, kind, sincere, loving, generous, warm); (b) relate popular fun (e.g., playful,

outgoing, friendly, athletic, good-looking); (c) include attributions of success (e.g., intelligence, independence, confidence, ambition); and (d) indicate gender.

Using this knowledge, Mehrabian (2001) completed six additional studies and identified the following overarching themes about first names: (a) men's names were considered to have less ethical caring and more successful characteristics than female names; (b) nicknames carried with them less successful characteristics than given names; (c) androgynous names connoted popular fun but less ethical caring and more masculine characteristics for women than gender-specific names; (d) non-traditional spellings of names were less attractive; and (e) longer men's names noted more ethical caring and more success. Further, Mehrabian found that "more anxiety and neuroticism were attributed to those with less common names and more exuberance was attributed to those with more attractive names" (p. 59). These findings demonstrate the significance of a name and the connotations names have related to other's expectations. These findings have implications for teachers who could attribute their own assumptions about a student simply based on his or her given first name.

In the social science literature, field experiments known as audit studies are used to examine racial differences in outcomes. In correspondence method/audits, names are used to signal the race of hypothetical subjects. Gaddis (2017a) identified three characteristics of a name that may influence an individual's perception of race stemming from the name: (a) the population racial composition of a first name; (b) the population socioeconomic status composition of a first name; and (c) the population racial composition of a last name. Research has indicated that there are first names which are unique to specific racial or ethnic groups. For example, consider the name *Jamal*. If the name Jamal is more frequently attached to a Black person, then it will become recognized in the general population as a Black name (Gaddis, 2017a). Using

correspondence audit studies and racial perceptions, findings of the study indicated that names, such as *Jalen* and *Nia*, names which are more commonly given by highly educated Black mothers, are less likely to be perceived as Black than names such as *DaShawn* or *Tanisha* which are given by less-educated Black mothers, adding that there is a misguided assumption in social science literature that all Black names are alike.

In a similar study examining racial perceptions of Hispanic names, Gaddis (2017b) employed a survey in which respondents were asked to identify the race or ethnicity they associate with a combination of Hispanic and Anglo first and last names. Results indicated that respondents identified first names as Hispanic at extremely high rates when matched with a Hispanic last name. These findings led Gaddis (2017b) to caution the interpretation of results using names to indirectly signal ethnicities and race, stating, “names may not only signal race and ethnicity with different levels of strength, but may also convey signals about culture, generational status, assimilation, or a variety of other characteristics” (p. 7).

In our nation, many parents of school-aged children search for months or even years for the perfect home, one that is situated in a neighborhood with excellent schools. In some cases, several generations of families live under one roof in order to provide economic support in their efforts to get their children enrolled in a desirable and high-performing school. Realtors often include the school’s letter grade in recommending homes to certain demographics. All of this energy is expended to provide generations yet to come with an edge to reach the American dream of success. Some researchers (e.g., Figlio, 2005, 2007; Mehrabian, 1990, 2001; Wattenberg, 2013) stated that the same care, attention, and passion should take place in the naming of our children. These researchers noted children may be treated differently in a variety of settings based upon their name and these differences may impact positive and negative

academic or behavioral outcomes (Gunn et al., 2013; Peterson et al., 2015). On the other hand, some parents work to find the most popular name, going as far as using online search engines to find articles related to “what’s in a name?” While no clear consensus persists in the literature, naming decisions make for rich conversation.

Shifting Demographics

As a child of immigrants living in the suburbs of East Orlando, it was difficult not to feel ostracized at times. My parents immigrated to the United States with hopes of working hard to achieve the American dream. They were able to defeat many obstacles and provide a better future for my sisters and me. At a very young age, I felt proud to be a daughter of immigrants. Although this may be true, I did find it difficult to feel proud of my Mexican culture at a young age. None of my classmates looked like me in elementary school, sounded like me, brought the same food as me, or had a name like mine. During my K-5 education, I can recall just wanting to fit in because being different was deemed weird and not easily accepted by others. Through self-reflection and genuine conversations with my parents, I began to appreciate what made me different from my classmates. Traveling to my parents’ hometown for the first time and witnessing their extremely humble beginnings was a monumental moment in my life. Interacting with the locals and seeing how happy some of them were with so little allowed me to find pride in my Mexican descent.

A big part of this development was my uncommon name. In either sixth or seventh grade, I become intrigued to find out more about my name. I wanted to know why my mother named me, the origin, history, and meaning of my name. To my surprise, my mother named me because of the famous perfume” that she and her mother loved. She loved the sound of it, and it reminded her of her mother, who she missed dearly due to distance. My name means gracious and merciful. My name is of French origin, and it is believed to be the French Provençal and Catalan version of Anna. The responses to these questions made me admire the unique name I was given. This appreciation of the name I was given created a ripple effect in my life. I began to admire my culture; what made me different is what makes me special. I no longer spent anytime wishing to fit in and be part of a culture I don’t truly identify with. ~ Anais Placencia

In one of the largest school districts in the nation, the student population represents over 200 countries or regions and over 160 languages. The demographics of this large school district mirror those of our nation. Nationally, between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of White students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools decreased from 61% to 48% and the percentage of Black students also decreased from 17% to 15% (National Center for Educational

Statistics [NCES], 2020). In contrast, the number of Hispanic/Latino students increased from 16% to 27%, and Asian/Pacific Islander student enrollment increased from four percent to five percent. Additionally, the population of students who identify as multiracial (i.e., two or more races) is projected to be the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group over the next several decades. Data from NCES (2020) noted racial and ethnic minorities accounted for 20% of all public elementary and secondary school teachers in the nation during the 2015-16 school year. Furthermore, in the past 30 years, Hispanic teachers have surpassed the number of Black teachers as the second-largest racial or ethnic group among public school teachers (NCES, 2020).

School demographics across the nation continue to shift as student populations and surrounding communities reflect the multicultural richness of diverse backgrounds. This diversity is mirrored in a person's name. Names can indicate that an individual belongs to a particular ethnic or cultural group (Gerhards & Hans, 2009). Parents often select a historically and culturally common name to preserve their cultural identity and express their ethnic belonging. However, the strong correlation between ethnic names and behavioral, social, educational, and even economic expectations can have several implications and far-reaching consequences. For immigrants, name selection often happens at the intersection of acculturation and ethnic maintenance (Gerhards & Hans, 2009).

UNICEF (2019) reports that globally, over 395,000 babies were born. In the United States alone, a birth occurs every eight seconds and nearly 10,400 births are recorded each day (Martin et al., 2019). Each of these births carries a name, whether it be Nisreen, Rafael, MezNari, or Mohammed. Oftentimes these names go unnoticed except by family members or close friends, unless the name belongs to someone deemed famous or bears an extraordinary or

unusual connotation. Take, for example, the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. Upon announcing his candidacy, critics not only questioned the origin of his name but his place of birth and citizenship. In response, on at least one occasion, he casually referred to himself as the “skinny kid with the funny name” (Bond, 2013, p.13).

Naming Practices of Immigrant Families

Immigration today impacts all continents essentially allowing families who immigrate to any nation to live transnationally (Sánchez & Machado-Casas, 2009). Transnationalism allows families to identify with their new country while still preserving their cultural identity from their home country. This immersion in dual countries allows for cultural preservation and is often adopted by first-generation immigrants. This allows children to acculturate to U.S. public schools while still maintaining close ties to their home countries which has “implications for curricula, language teaching, professional development, and teacher/leader preparation programs” (Sánchez & Machado-Casas, 2009, p. 9). The impact of immigration, especially of Latina/o students on the U.S. public school system, is critical as it is expected that the number of Hispanic school-aged children will increase by 166% from 11 million to 28 million, while the rate of increase of non-Hispanic children is expected to increase by four percent during the same time from 43 million to 45 million (Sánchez & Machado-Casas, 2009).

Despite the increasing diversity, stigma remains with cultural names. Names can become possible sources of discrimination given the perceptions aligned with ethnic names (Peterson et al., 2015). As Gerhards and Hans (2009) indicated, “first names carry social consequences” as “people use first names to infer the age, attractiveness, and intelligence of the name’s bearer” (p. 1125).

Nontraditional Names and Cultural Competence

Minimal research can be found on developing pre-service and in-service teachers' dispositional attributes based on the importance on uncommon names (Lang et al., 2019). For instance, many White middle-class teachers who come to urban schools are entering an environment that represents a culture and climate different from their own. This can be disconcerting or confusing (Moore, 2016). Teachers who lack experiences which deviate from their normative cultures require assistance in gaining awareness and understanding of culturally inspired names. Many novice teachers may be unaware of cultures or communities different than their own. However, lack of awareness cannot serve as an excuse. As the United States becomes increasingly ethnically and racially diverse, so do educational settings. Content knowledge and skills are no longer the only critical competencies required for pre-service and in-service teachers. Many states desire, require, and hire teachers willing to embrace cultural connections and critical dispositions that demonstrate their willingness to reach out to their diverse student and parent populations (Moore, 2016).

Name Discrimination, Shaming, and Signaling

Entering a Research I predominantly White institution as a Black male with a name such as mine placed me in the scientific experimental group of the “not too bright” while my peers with “normal” (again, whatever normal is) names were placed in the genius group. My mother explained the importance of me being aware of these and the many other un-motivational factors that I was about to embark upon as an academic scholar. For most students my age, hearing this story would infuriate them and have them second guessing their opportunity to attend such an institution. However, for me it did not! The moral of the story was for me to remain aware, advocate and act, be deliberate an intentional never apologizing for my name and what my name entails.

Having said that, I will always remain honest, even when it hurts. I must say, at the time, the story my mother shared did hurt. However, this was unlike an external or even internal type of hurt that people normally think about when they hear the word “hurt”. This hurt was not for me, but for others, a hurt of sick and sadness for society. It is through my lived experiences that I have witnessed societies lack of desire to look beyond their own (current) dominate cultural norms. ~ MezNari M. Moore

Our names are how we introduce ourselves to the world. They serve as our initial identifier and likely influence the way we are perceived. Newman and colleagues (2018) polled 500 college students from four regions across the nation to rate 400 popular male and female names from the last seven decades in terms of age, warmth, and competence. For example, one question asked: *Imagine that you are about to meet Samantha. How competent/warm/old, do you think she is when you see her name?* Newman and colleagues (2018) uncovered gender stereotypes noting that when it came to warmth and competence, a clear gender effect persisted. Names associated with low competence and high warmth tended to be female, such as *Hannah*, *Melody*, and *Mia*. Conversely, names associated with high competence and low warmth tended to be considered male name, such as *Howard*, *Lawrence*, and *Reginald*.

Holbrook and colleagues (2016) conducted a series of three experiments involving approximately 1,500 mostly White adults. The first study manipulated stereotypical White versus Black names and the second study manipulated Asian versus Hispanic names. The third study explored racial bias and how people use their perception and background knowledge to produce an imagined person's size or to determine if someone is either threatening or high-status. Through these studies, Holbrook and colleagues (2016) found that people envisioned men with stereotypically Black names as bigger and more violent.

Further, the mostly White participants ages 18 to their mid-70s and who self-identified as politically to the left of center read one of two nearly identical vignettes. One vignette featured a man named either *Jamal*, *DeShawn*, or *Darnell*, and the other vignette featured a man named *Connor*, *Wyatt*, or *Garrett*. The monikers were selected based on prior research that associated each set of names with particular ethnic groups. Not only did the participants envision the characters with Black-sounding names as larger even though the average height of Black and

White men were the same, they also linked size and status in opposite ways depending on the assumed race of the characters (Holbrook et al., 2016). In other words, the more physically large the participants imagined the characters with Black-sounding names, the lower they envisioned their financial success, social influence, and respect in their community.

Educational Attainment and Teacher Efficacy

Most teachers try to engage in teaching strategies that are responsive to culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse students (Peterson et al., 2015). Many of the beliefs teachers hold and lessons they are taught about students of color and how to best facilitate these students' learning can have positive effects on student outcomes (Guillory, 2016 & Steele, 2011). While these beliefs may seem sensible and are acted upon with good intent, they can also have negative consequences resulting in negative outcomes for students (Boysen & Vogel, 2009; Guillory, 2016; Steele, 2011). Everyone has bias; it is inherent based on our own experiences and belief systems. However, it is critical that teachers examine their biases whether related to gender, race, ethnicity, names, or socioeconomic status. All biases must be examined and reflected upon (Anderson, 2011; Buehler, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Shane, 2010).

Our nation's classrooms are a microcosm of our society. In an April 2020 edition of *The Educational Researcher*, scholars from Princeton and Tuft universities compared the explicit and implicit biases of teachers with those of other adults in our nation, noting that teachers themselves need to acknowledge the role that they play in perpetuating inequities in schools (Starck et al., 2020). Teacher attitudes and dispositions have major implications on students' social emotional learning as well as their academic achievement. Therefore, intentional professional learning should be provided for teachers so they can become aware of their dispositions to either shift or mitigate the effect of their own biases (Kanahara, 2006; Lang et al.,

2019; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018). This training is important because of the impact that teachers

Staats (2016) noted that teachers touch innumerable lives in many ways each and every day, and we must ensure the best for all students. Professional learning related to implicit bias can provide a pathway for teachers to explore how stereotypes effect beliefs and actions, including in an unconscious manner, and how they can work to mitigate those effects (Staats, 2016). Clifford et al. (2019) affirmed that we are all subject to biases and that admitting this creates a safer space to examine them more carefully and to take steps to reflect on and address them.

The relationship and interactions among educational attainment, socioeconomic status, and naming practices continues to be of great importance. A growing body of research contends that a child's name may affect how society and especially teachers view and treat children (Anderson-Clark, et al., 2008; Figlio, 2007; Peterson et al., 2015). These differing expectations could impact student learning which affect their future success.

Some researchers (e.g., Fryer & Levitt, 2004) contend that the income level of the mother's neighborhood also corresponds to naming practices. White, Latina/o, and Black mothers are less likely to choose uncommon names as their neighborhood incomes rise. Additionally, with the exception of Black mothers, they are also more likely to choose popular names associated with greater neighborhood income (Oliver et al., 2016). Names are distinct markers of race and socioeconomic class (Cooper, 2011). Teachers may use a student's name as a signal of unobserved parental contributions to that child's education and expect less from children with names that "sound" like they were given by uneducated parents (Figlio, 2005).

Lessons from the Field and Reflections

Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I was always prepared to give my teachers or substitutes a crash course on how to pronounce my name. There were countless times during roll call where the substitute would take a long pause and say, "Sorry, I know I am going to butcher this." In hindsight, those were some of the best teachers because they took the time to ensure that they are pronouncing my name correctly. Thankfully through repetition, most of my teachers were able to remember how to say my name after a couple of months, but it wasn't until college where I had teachers who never got it right.

Being repeatedly called the wrong name was an uncomfortable situation because I respect my professors so much that I couldn't build up the courage to tell them they had been mispronouncing my name. The worst case is when a teacher avoids calling on you because they don't know how to say your name. These experiences have allowed me to be conscious of pronouncing every student's name correctly as a future educator. It should never be the child's job to correct the teacher. There will come a moment where I don't know how to pronounce one of my student's names, and my job is to use that opportunity to learn not to embarrass a child for having an uncommon name. Every child deserves to grow up loving their unique name and cultural background. My aim is that every student who walks into my classroom feels valued, respected, and appreciated. Educators should understand the significance and positive outcomes that proceed from creating a culturally responsive classroom. Now at 21 years old, I have developed the skills and strength to correct people who mispronounce my name because I am doing a disservice to us both if I don't speak up. ~ MezNari M. Moore

First Names and Teacher Expectations

Anderson-Clark and colleagues (2008) examined perceptions of achievement motivation as influenced by first name and student ethnicity. In their study, 130 elementary school teachers were given a vignette of a fifth-grade student and instructed to judge the behavior and characteristics of the student. Results indicated a significant main effect aligned with an ethnic first name. Ratings whose descriptions used an African American-sounding name rather than a White-sounding name predicted significantly lower achievement scores.

Suggestions/Guidelines for Today's Teachers

To create a safe and inclusive classroom environment, teachers can engage in some simple but high-impact behaviors that make students feel welcome.

- *Address personal bias.* Fostering a classroom culture that is welcoming to all students begins with the teacher “identifying, acknowledging, and addressing their own biases” (Slanda et al., 2020, p. 11). *Bias* refers to the beliefs or associations one has about a particular group (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2017). By analyzing their own identity, teachers can explore how bias may influence their interactions with students (Utt & Tochluk, 2020) and work to address that bias to ensure they respect student’s names, which is a reflection of their cultural, racial, or ethnic identity.
- *Treat every name with utmost respect.* Respecting a student’s name is critical to building relationships. Individual names are representative of one’s identity and a teacher’s decision to respect a student’s name is based on a language hierarchy and bias—it illustrates the teacher’s commitment to supporting a student and echoes a sense of belonging (Jepson, 2020).
- *Learn to pronounce and spell every name correctly.* McLaughlin (2016) asserted, “pronouncing students’ names incorrectly is a slight that can isolate students and affect learning” and pronouncing a student’s name correctly “should always be a priority for any classroom teacher” (para.1). Mispronouncing or incorrectly spelling a student’s name can have a lasting impact on the student by sending a message that their name, a piece of their identity, is not important enough to be learned properly. Further, it can cause feelings of anxiety, invisibility, shame, resentment and humiliation (Cornwall, 2018). If a teacher is unsure how to pronounce a student’s name, they can ask the student to pronounce it first and to teach it to them. For example, a teacher can ask: “can you help me say your name? I don’t want to pronounce it incorrectly.” This removes any chance of

incorrect pronunciations. Similarly, a teacher can ask the student to help them spell the name correctly. This gesture signifies the importance of the student and their cultural identity.

- *Honor each child's cultural heritage by never asking to change to an Anglicized name.* Asking students to change their name to something that is more easily pronounced or represents an Anglicized name can be interpreted as offensive and may leave students with feelings of alienation and shame. Respecting the student's name and honoring his or her culture is critical to building relationships with students.

Teachers remain the driving force of the educational system. Teaching and learning are reciprocal processes. The way teachers teach, speak, and behave with students can make a permanent impression, even more so than what they teach. Therefore, not only must teachers become researchers of their students' lives, backgrounds, and culture if they expect to make a difference, but they must also create spaces in which they can learn *with* their students. Further, Wildhagen (2012) observed, as human beings, we generalize about other people, ideas, and events based on our personal constructions of reality and through our own cultural lens. By examining our own biases, we can communicate that all cultures are valued equally, and that the teacher's cultural lens is no more important than the student's cultural identity.

Every Child Needs a Champion

*Born of Vietnamese parents who spoke little English, seven-year-old Susie often found herself in the position of 'cultural interpreter' for her parents. Whenever there was a major business decision to be made, she accompanied her parents to the venue. Bright far beyond her years and one who spoke English flawlessly, she could not understand why she was placed in the ESOL classes, and neither could her teachers explain. However, the one issue that caused the most angst was the spelling of her last name. It was adorned by one single capital letter and it stood alone. When it was 'share time' in her third-grade class, and each took turns saying their names, she dreaded participating. New to the school, her novice teacher quickly realized what was going on. The next day, she brought in a new book for 'share time,' *The Name Jar*, by Yangsook Choi. At about*

the same time, there was a leader of the free world with a 'funny sounding name' and a famous comedian whose name was pronounced almost the same as hers. It didn't hurt that she was emerging as one of the smartest kids in the whole school, and she was so well-behaved. But it all started with the love and support of a caring teacher! ~ (M.S. Lue Stewart, personal communication, n.d.)

Feeling welcomed and comfortable in a classroom is a prerequisite for learning for all students. One step in the right direction for teachers is to learn and pronounce childrens' names correctly. The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards stated that pronouncing students' names correctly indicates care and concern from the teacher (Khan-Baker, 2016). Further, one of the first steps to build a relationship with students is by knowing their names, thus modeling expected behaviors while cultivating and fostering a climate that all names are welcomed and respected in this classroom. It says to the student that "you matter." Our student stories are never linear. There remains a powerful desire to fit in; to explain one's heritage is often a desire of many. These explanations are often shaped by historical and possibly current situations, to connect to something bigger than oneself and his or her purpose for life (Obama, 2020).

What's in a name? Whether intentional or not, it is our role—whatever educational role to which we are assigned—to work within all our might to suspend all bias to promote each child's success. Whether one's name is attached to a stereotype or cultural assumption, today's teachers must work toward an inclusive, and accepting diverse classroom that lends respect for all.

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