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Welcome to the Fall 2013/Winter 2014 Edition of the QUEST: Journal of Higher Education Excellence (QJHEE). QJHEE is a peer-reviewed, online published journal devoted to advancing scholarship and practice in the areas of Interdisciplinary Studies, Multicultural Education, and Minority Males in education with an emphasis on the African American and Hispanic male. QJHEE publishes research on a variety of educational issues. More so, QJHEE features articles that are grounded in research, theory and experiential knowledge, as well as, promote critical examination of issues facing minority males in education.
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THE QUEST: JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION EXCELLENCE

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Theme: “Closing the Achievement Gap for Males of Color: Constructing the Pipeline from K-12 to Higher Education.”

The executive directors of the QUEST: Journal of Higher Education Excellence invites workshop proposals for the 5th Annual African American Male Conference in Higher Education to be held on April 10-11, 2014 at Baltimore City Community College. For more information, please email TheQUEST@bccc.edu.
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The Editors are looking for manuscripts that take as their topic the full range of Interdisciplinary and Liberal Arts related issues in primary, secondary and higher education worldwide. It is the hope of the editorial board that reports of quality research and practice will be published from schools around the world. Submitted manuscripts might take the form of (but are not strictly limited to) original empirical articles, theoretical analyses, book reviews, commentaries, literature reviews/conceptual analysis and reports of successful practices in higher education. Theoretically driven studies of hypotheses that have implications for understanding and improving the study and practice of diverse educational communities are particularly encouraged. Authors of manuscripts examining basic theory and research should identify implications for more applied topics, and authors of manuscripts dealing with more applied topics should draw conclusions that are relevant to basic research and theory.

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ADVERTISING DEADLINE: MARCH 25
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With the demand to increase more college graduates in America, there is an impetus for social academic change to occur in higher education. College administrators must examine their institutional learning goals in order to ensure that degree completion is the documented outcome. Today—students learn differently, and they desire to be engaged greatly within the teaching and learning process. Both faculty and administrators must learn

“QUEST: The Model for a New Education”

At the eve of the 21st Century, African American male students tend to have the lowest graduation rates in America (The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2011). Currently, the average time it takes for a student to complete the two year degree (Associate) based on full-time enrollment is approximately 3.8 years (Complete College American, n.d.). However, the time is much longer for the African American male to complete his degree. Often—it is believed that the governing reason is that they are underprepared academically, as well as, lack the motivation to excel. With that being said, it is clear that a large number of higher educational institutions worked to create a learning culture where they are excluded from advancing at the academy, but remained present in the lower paradigm of Developmental Education within the areas of English, Math, and Reading.

After carefully examining this social academic ill, I became frustrated and determined to change the framework of the old teaching and learning culture in higher education. Far too long, many administrators and instructors believed that teaching was just the mere process of sharing information without engagement. If the outcome goal is to educate and then graduate, then instructors must incorporate active engagement in the classroom. African American male students must feel welcomed and part of their learning experience—if it is to be meaningful. Harper and Quaye (2009) posited that “weak institutions are those that expect students to engage themselves. . . . A clear signal of institutional deficiency is when there are few ramifications for
those who either blatantly refuse or unintentionally neglect to enact the practices known to produce rich outcomes for students” (p. 6). Students deserve more, and educational leaders must realize that students need to be directed and mentored within the learning process.

While working to change the platform of teaching and learning, I found that it was important to mentor and re-educate the instructor to become the instructor of learning first, and then the instructor to the student holistically. The instructional development training was based solely on the VANCE THEORY CONCEPT: Value, Appreciate, Nurture, Care, and Educate (Vance, 2005).

*Figure 1: The Vance Theory Concept*

The Vance Theory Concept (2005) served as the passport to introduce administrators and instructors to the ideology of accepting the Value of the student’s culture within the learning environment as an intricate part of learning engagement. African American male students are directly connected to their culture, and their culture is the first foundational course that is taught in their first school—which is home. Seemingly—when both administrators and instructors display a vested interest in the culture of the African American male students, they tend to participate more in the learning process because they (African American male students feel connected and included.

After a year of intense training with instructors and re-educating educational administrators in the learning areas of Course Learning Design, Developmental Education, and Teaching and Learning at Baltimore City Community College, I was able to implement the first stage of my seven tier program design for African American male students—titled The QUEST (Vance, 2005). The QUEST Learning Cohort Program is an intense accelerated academic program designed to recruit, retain, and graduate African American males in one year from a community college. The program design focuses specifically on creating a learning environment which will
foster, motivate, and stimulate academic growth for African American men, who are traditionally under-prepared for the rigors of higher education. In addition, the program model prepares African American men for the Associate’s Degree in one of four programs: Allied Human Services, Business, Criminal Justice, and General Studies which are all structured to serve as the passport for transferring to the four-year institution.

Further, the QUEST Program is uniquely prescribed by offering custom tailored classes designed to provide students with a well-rounded educational experience rooted in education educational excellence second to none. Next, instructors are selected based upon their instructional skills, teaching pedagogy, teaching ideology, and demonstrated passion for working with African American male students after completing a semester of intense teaching and learning training, incorporating technology team teaching, and completing the Writing Training of the Vance-Brooks Model (2006).

Today, it is noted that the QUEST Program made ground breaking history of being the first and the only program at a community college to graduate five consecutive classes of African American male scholars to earn the Associate Degree in one year from 2009—2013 with a 100% retention rate while operating on a zero dollar budget. Although the QUEST Program operated on a zero dollar budget, the program generated over $12.5 million in full-time equivalent (FTE) revenue. The QUEST Program is a successful model for time to degree completion for the non-traditional African American male student.

In addition, there are more than 200 students who earned degrees and certificates via the navigation of the QUEST Program, as well as, continued their studies earning both the bachelor and master degrees from Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominately White Institutions. More so, there have been more than 700 reverse transfer students who were able to matriculate within their respective academic programs by participating in the QUEST Program. The success of the program is credited to the designed and the continuous professional development training both for administrators and instructors by employing refined, cutting-edge, researched practices in student engagement, teaching and learning, and the collaborative team teaching instructional cohort practice.

Based upon the QUEST Program model design and its success, there are a number of community colleges and universities who are actively developing, revising, and re-structuring their educational program offerings to ensure that African American male students will be successful at their institutions. Still, with the various concerns regarding education and degree completion for African American males, it is imperative that more changes be made immediately at all higher educational institutions. African American males have been overlooked in the classroom as bright promising leaders, but they are readily seen as the educational research targets, classified as non-academic achievers.
References


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This paper is one in a series of papers to come associated with the novel concept of The Cognitive Lens (CL) Model in which Atherton and Hines (unpublished work, 2013) present multifarious factors that work simultaneously to initiate the inception and development of individuals’ cognitive lens which impact student adjustment specifically within the context of school. The purpose of this paper is to focus on a specific component of the model—School—discussing crucial competencies that faculty and teachers must have that positively impact their pedagogical practice to facilitate student success. Educational implications are also addressed in relation to the different constructs focused on in the paper. The authors are by no means suggesting that their offering is the answer to all educational issues of student failure; rather, the contribution is provided as a fresh way to look at the issues.

Theory and empirical research provide a plethora of constructs and paradigms focused on skills and competencies that teachers (in-service and pre-service) should develop to support students’ positive adjustment—for example, Marzano's Nine Instructional Strategies for Effective Teaching and Learning—in B-12 educational institutions. Another paradigm can be seen in Sizemore’s (1989) work; her book, *Effective Schools: Critical Issues in the Education of Black Children*, addressed practices categorized as routines (ten) that serve to fast-track, promote, and advance students’ success and that should be utilized in training within educational institutes and systems.

There is also a body of work focused on principles of effective teaching for faculty in institutions of higher learning. For instance, Ramsden (2003) in his book, *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, provide six learning principles that faculty in institutions of higher education can utilize to support their professional development. Atherton and Hines (2013) in their unpublished paper based on the Cognitive Lens Model (see figure1) endorse previous offerings from varied
sources in terms of competencies for effective practice and student success. Some of the traits they highlight include high teacher efficacy, intentionality, the ability to utilize multiple instructional strategies to ensure that every day every student is given an opportunity to experience successful learning and positive adjustment within diverse learning environments throughout school, effective communication skills, the capacity to engage in and model critical thinking, cogent flexibility, the ability to engage in on-going reflection, holding high expectations for all students, ensuring that content is interesting, engaging in the learning and instructional process as one of the learners within the community (understanding even as an expert one can gain knowledge from students), accepting students by respecting them and getting to know them in order to best support their needs, and equipping students with self-regulating strategies (Epstein, 2009; Regan, 2012; Larivee, 2000; Bulger, Mohr, & Walls, 2002; Sternberg & Horvath, 1995). Even as consideration is given to the competencies outlined, it is important to note that there is not one explicit guaranteed approach; rather, there are diverse ideologies and strategies that can be utilized in concert based on the specific students in question that would facilitate student success.
While the qualities and routines aforementioned are fundamental characteristics and practices, which the Cognitive Lens support that effective teachers evidence and in which they engage, they are not quite comprehensive in that they do not consider the crucial four Cs’ (cultural proactivity, culturally responsive pedagogy, cultural congruence, and cultural competence) as put forward in the Cognitive Lens Model (CL). Also, given the educational disparities that are still evident in classrooms throughout America in the 21st century—as supported by NCES 2011 data—as well as, the focus on the gifted and talented (Baker, 2013), it is important to examine other competencies that could positively impact students in general and more specifically, many more students of color gaining entry into more rigorous classes that foster their ability to develop critical thinking skills. Thus, a critical piece of the puzzle that should be addressed is the concept of the four cultural competencies as embedded within the CL model that 21st century teachers
need to have in their tool box. The theory advocates the case that faculty in higher education institutions as well as, in-service and pre-service teachers must develop the capacity to employ culturally proactive (“cultural proactivity”) actions and behaviors, to be culturally responsive to the needs of students within their care, to practice cultural congruency, and develop cultural competence to expedite the positive adjustment of all students. In order for higher education faculty and pre-service and in-service teachers to acquire and cultivate these qualities department heads and deans across colleges/departments in higher education institutions, teacher programs within institutions of higher education and school principals/educational directors (B-12) must make available on-going professional development and curriculum that address these vital components that facilitate the progress and development of these competencies and in turn the cognitive lens of higher education faculty as well as in-service and pre-service teachers.

Figure 2: School Component

The concept of “cultural proactivity” speaks to faculty, pre-service and in-service teachers’ cognizance of their own identities and the identities of their diverse students. But, it is even more profound than this; culturally proactive individuals in addition to becoming aware, they acquire, consume, examine and evaluate information in order to develop knowledge initially about their own cultural heritage and successively their students’ culture. Knowledge of one’s own cultural heritage supports openness to primarily learning about and consequently positively recognizing other individuals’ cultural legacies. This, in turn, develops the individual’s cognitive lens so that it allows faculty and teachers to develop curriculum that is more reflective of all students. It can also facilitate faculty and teachers’ ability to consider the diverse ways of knowing with which diverse students come. Culturally proactive individuals do not believe that their own cultural ways of thinking and behaving characterize or are symbolic of the nature of people and so is the correct way to reason or act (as supported by Parrish & Linder-VanBerschot, 2010). Rather, they seriously consider other ways of knowing that are culturally diverse than their own. Additionally, gaining knowledge of other cultures promotes the idea that there is not a single
story, which can be dangerous because of stereotypes, but that there are multifarious perspectives and experiences that exist within every context. Possible positive outcomes include students developing the ability to accept, respect, and think critically about another person’s perspective. Also, students who see reflections of themselves in the curriculum will come to more readily value what they learn within the context of school even when home and community values may differ from that of school. It also opens the door for mutual respect and acceptance by all stakeholders within the learning environment. Commensurate with this, other students learn to value their peers who may be diverse from them in terms of race, learning styles, etc.

“Cultural proactivity” leads or lends itself to culturally responsive teaching (supported by Gay, 2010; Ladson Billings, 2010). Not only will culturally proactive faculty and teachers utilize the analogy of the mirror with regard to the curriculum, they will also learn about their students in terms of their learning styles. The cognitive lens that these faculty and teachers utilize will be impacted by the knowledge they have of what students value and the learning styles of all students including diverse students. Many students of color, like African Americans, Latinos, and Indigenous/Native Americans learn through teamwork. Within these cultures, cooperative learning is greatly valued in preference to academic competition. Children from these cultures as well as Asian children are taught that the good of the community is more important than the good of the individual (as supported by Herndon, 2013). Also significant, many children particularly boys tend to need more physical activity in addition to kinesthetic learning activities. An educational implication is that faculty and teachers in B-20 institutions do not only need to get to know their students, but also need to proactively plan instruction that considers different ways of knowing—learning styles and cultural learning styles/traditions. With such knowledge and understanding, the cognitive lens that faculty and teachers utilize as they work with all students will support their capacity to provide culturally responsive pedagogy that facilitate student success.

Educators who learn to become “Cultural proactivity” and engage in culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy facilitates cultural congruency. The concept of cultural congruence entails knowing and respecting diverse cultures in terms of backgrounds, cultures, and languages of diverse students (Zeichner, 1995). Crucial as well to this competence is the necessity for faculty and educators to develop universal knowledge of sociocultural factors associated with human development, acquisition of a second language, and the manner in which socio economic contexts, language, and culture impact performance in school (in line with the Vygotskian perspective). Ultimately, faculty and teachers must construct perspectives of their own racial and cultural identities so as to have the capacity to comprehend, regard, and respect those of their students. This enables both higher education faculty and teachers in B-12 institutions to comprehend how their cultural prejudices may affect their personal judgments in relation to students’ performance, as well as, hinder students’ capacity to learn.

This perspective is directly in line with the Cognitive Lens perspective. The phenomenon of cultural congruence from the Cognitive Lens viewpoint involves faculty and teachers’ ability to move beyond cultural awareness. Faculty (B-20) must not only be cognizant of their own cultural identity and the cultural identity of their students’; they must also come to understand the complexities associated with traditions, norms, values, beliefs, ways of knowing, and other facets of cultural identity. Also fundamental to the phenomenon of cultural congruency from the
cognitive lens perspective is one’s acceptance of one’s own and other peoples’ culture differences and similarities between and across cultures. In alignment with the Cognitive Lens Theory, when one experiences cognitive congruence, one embraces one’s own cultural identity and is able to support cultural perspectives that are diverse in nature from one’s own. Faculty (B-20) who experience cultural congruency comprehend and appreciate that diversity should be celebrated and viewed as gifts and the differences not to be feared or seen as disadvantages or handicaps. Rather, faculty (B-20) would utilize the knowledge to support student success as well as, enhancing their own pedagogical skill set. Faculty who experience cultural congruency, understand that the success of underrepresented, underserved, and disenfranchised individuals positively impacts everyone; specifically, when consideration is given to the economic growth and advantages to the nation that can be derived from ensuring a more literate population (as suggested in Close the Gap: The Itasca Project, 2005).

Commensurate with this, identity development is fundamental to the development of “cultural proactivity” and cultural congruency. Different identity development models deal with various races, sexual orientations, socioeconomics and socialization of individuals; these should be employed in the educational process not only for the holistic development of students, but also for the efficacy of faculty, teachers, families, and community members. Notably, there are multifarious models to consider in terms of similarities and differences. One goal should be to emphasize and capture the stages on the Majority and Minority Identity Development models to foster an overall sense of cultural proactivity and congruence to not only succeed in a multicultural society or globally, but address and strive for a more pluralistic society that speaks to the acknowledgment and respect of cultures in lieu of tolerance. This should facilitate the progress from deficit ideologies to more assets based education in terms of culture, traditions, norms, policies, laws, and practice not only just in B-12 institutions, but also in institutions of higher education.

The educational implication associated with faculty (B-20) and other school and college/university employees experiencing cultural congruency due to their engagement in culturally proactive pursuits, culturally responsive teaching/undertakings, and culturally relevant pedagogy is that they become culturally competent individuals who contribute to the positive adjustment of all students within the context of school/college/university. Culturally competent faculty positively impact school culture because they comprehend and appreciate their own cultural identity and are open to learning about their students’ cultural ways of knowing and learning styles, understanding students’ family structures, teaching curriculum that is inclusive and reflective of students, addressing the multiple stories in preference to one story, and are accepting and supportive of diverse cultures (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Ramsden, 2003).

Another component vital to student success relates to expertise, specifically the novel conception of novice and veteran experts. The difference between novice experts and veteran experts is the degree or level of experience and proficiency they evidence. Thus, novice experts have the same qualities and abilities, as do their more experienced counterparts; however, novice experts operate at a lower level of expertise than do (veteran) seasoned experts. Some components that lend themselves but are not limited to expertise include intentionality (every action is supported by a sound rationale), critical thinking, cogent flexibility (knowing when and how to adapt), use
of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, “cultural proactivity”, culturally responsive teaching, cultural competence, and cultural congruency. As individuals move along the cultural spectrum, their learning needs to be continually assessed (Sizemore, 1989) for cultivation and a continuing shift in their paradigms. An educational implication is that educators in education programs embedded in higher education institutions along with school superintendents and principals respectively in B-12 institutions need to provide course work and professional development programs that support pre-service and in-service teachers with the ability to engage in the instructional and learning process initially as novice experts and with time as veteran experts who consistently develop, practice, and hone their skills with the intent to facilitate students’ positive adjustment within the instructional and learning context (Atherton, 2010; Farmer et al., 2007; Hamm & Faircloth, 2005a). Having presented this notion, there is also a need for faculty in institutions of higher education who have expertise in their respective fields to gain pedagogical expertise initially at the novice level and with time at the veteran stage. Very few higher education faculty receive methodology classes. One may have expert knowledge, in relation to one’s academic domain; however, that does not necessitate knowledge of how to impart the information in multiple modes. In regard to the novice expert and veteran expert phenomenon, both of these experts need to demonstrate characteristics that are in alignment with the skills and competencies previously mentioned (as supported by Marzano, Ramsden, 2003; Sizemore, 1989), “The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education” (NCATE) standards, as well as with other recognized accreditation boards. Specifically, the Cognitive Lens theory and model promotes the idea that faculty, pre-service teachers and in-service teachers must gain knowledge, strategies, skills, and tools that experts have including having the capacity to present information in multiple ways—to provide opportunities for every student to learn—being culturally competent, culturally congruent, culturally proactive, engaging in culturally responsive pedagogy, and utilizing both cognitive and metacognitive strategies (including knowing what strategies to utilize and when as well as, how to utilize cognitive strategies in their craft) to reiterate a few. However, the theory also maintains that even as faculty and both pre-service and many in-service teachers acquire the skills and attributes of master pedagogues (i.e. expert instructors), they may still be at the novice level in terms of proficiency and experience.

An educational implication relating to faculty and in-service and pre-service teachers’ mastery of the four Cs’ and the other core competencies addressed earlier is the impact on student’s perceptions of emotional risk is connected to their sense of belonging within the educational contexts in which they hold membership. In relation to facilitation of students’ sense of belonging, faculty, teachers, administrators, and others within the context of school/college/university (including classrooms, courses, libraries, clubs, playground, cafeteria, etc.) need to set a classroom and campus culture that is both welcoming and accepting of all members of the collective. Sense of belonging has been conceptualized by McMillan and Chavis (1986) as individuals having the feeling that they have a position in the group, a sense that they are significant to others within the collective, a sense that their needs are satisfied, and they experience a mutual emotional connection. Expressly, sense of belonging can be demarcated as the understanding one has about a specific context, a notion that affiliates are significant to each other and the consortium, as well as, all members hold a common view that the wants of everyone in the collective will be satisfied because of their allegiance (Atherton, 2010, McMillan & Chavis, 1986, McMillan, 1976). The sense of belonging that individuals experience within the context of school/college/University can facilitate perceptions of emotional security or
emotionally risky conditions. In school/college/university settings, one way to conceptualize emotional safety is in relation to the risk students perceive in participating in academic settings (Hamm and Faircloth, 2005a). These researchers explicitly intellectualized this construct as emotional riskiness. Students may view their classrooms (B-20) as unaccommodating environments (supported in Atherton, 2010; Hamm & Faircloth, 2005a). Such social situations may be perceived by students as not extending social or academic support because they do not provide opportunities for students to express their views or engage in discourse (as supported by Osterman, 2000). Within academic contexts, many students have concerns about derision by peers for actively participating in classroom undertakings or seeming too intelligent; this sometimes leads to classroom disconnection and conflict with educators (as supported by Atherton, 2010; Juvonen, 2010; Juvonen & Murdock, 1995). In classes in which responses are viewed as correct or incorrect and faculty and teachers are established as the main authority (note: there is a demonstrative difference in being an authoritative teacher/faculty and an authoritarian teacher/faculty) on students’ thoughts and offerings disengagement may be even more pronounced (Atherton, 2010; Hamm & Faircloth, 2005a; Juvonen, 2000; Juvonen & Murdock, 1995). In connection, the cognitive lens proposes that students would benefit if they experience peer support and insignificant emotional threat for their endeavors and contributions (Atherton, 2010; Osterman, 2000). Furthermore, within different academic settings when opportunities are provided for students to collaborate and engage in discourse and other like positive social interactions, they are apt to stimulate further prosocial behaviors that support success (Atherton, 2010; Osterman, 2000). Given this, it is obligatory for faculty, administrators, and staff in B-20 contexts to promote academic cultures in which students have these positive experiences that support positive adjustment within the context of learning environments. These experiences in accordance with the Cognitive Lens theory should be strongly associated with students’ overall positive adjustment.

Corresponding with this line of thinking, the theory (i.e. the cognitive lens) further proposes that in academic settings, faculty, administrators, and other staff need to provide and set up a culture that fosters terms of membership within the collective (i.e., classroom/school/college/university), common goals, and analogous beliefs, traditions, norms, and values that support the insight that all are accepted, appreciated and valued, the use of culturally responsive pedagogy, genuinely considering the perspectives of others, and an awareness that within educational contexts, all students need to have perceptions of emotional security rather than emotional risk. The same is true for faculty of color in B-20 institutions. They must be given authentic experiences that promote a sense of belonging and perceptions of emotional security. The implication here is that mentorship, continual support through professional development, initiation, promotion, and maintenance of cultural awareness and competence, and development of a cultural tradition that recognizes, accepts, and celebrates cultural differences must emerge. When considering the changing demographics of the American society with the influx of both, White and people of color from different countries as well as, the increase in domestic Brown and Black populations, the matter relating to the recruitment and retention of people of color as faculty, teachers, and administrators within educational organizations and systems must be addressed. An inference which can be drawn is that as populations of color grow so too must faculty of color increase in quantity in educational institutions. Also fundamental to securing student success, all faculty,
teachers, and administrators at different educational institutions in a myriad of contexts must gain the expertise discussed herein.

In conclusion, if we are to effectively serve 21st century students in B-20 educational institutions, it is necessary for faculty, teachers (in-service and pre-service), and administrators to receive training and on-going professional development that would support their capacity to engage in the type of practice that is reflective of an expert (whether at the novice or veteran levels respectively), culturally responsive, culturally proactive pursuits, and to become culturally congruent and culturally competent individuals. Also, consideration must be given to how cultural competency is a policy issue in closing the cultural achievement gap as well as how it correlates to accreditation bodies in higher education and professional teacher association bodies such as: The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), Association of American Educators (AAE) and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). In 2008, the National Education Association (NEA) identified three strategies which states can utilize to increase educators’ cultural competence: 1) preservice education, 2) ongoing professional development, and 3) licensure. The policy brief asserts that only one-third of states require teacher candidates to study some aspect of cultural diversity as part of their core preparation and/or experience a teaching practicum in a context that is culturally diverse. Only nine states currently have separate state standards specific to cultural knowledge or competence. The remaining states incorporate standards related to cultural awareness in their history or transcontinental (or world) language standards. We believe that the first two elements from the brief are essential and vital in helping to close the achievement gap in relation to students of color. We question, however, the extent to which assessment of individuals’ cultural competence as a part of the licensure process—state and national teacher licensure exams—occurs. Furthermore, the assumption that pre-service teachers will develop these competencies must be addressed more acutely and assessed in their pre-service programs prior to their licensure exams. Statistically valid and reliable assessments are available to address where both groups (preservice and in-service) teachers are on the spectrum of their ethnocentric and ethnorelative development; the assessment serves as a GPS mechanism in which individuals’ cultural congruency can be assessed and evaluated, development of the cognitive lens can be facilitated, and intentional learning and instruction and professional development for all educators can be supported. However, there seems to be a fear factor associated with cultural and intercultural development in the assessment of what teachers should know and be able to do. Institutions and teachers are accredited by bodies that impact diverse learners. Considering this, assessing cultural competence prior to licensure examination is essential in the preparation of pre-service teachers in working with diverse learners which will further support development of their cognitive lens in their practicum setting. In line with this, in-service teachers must be willing to assess their cultural competence as the information could facilitate shifts in and development of their cognitive lens and paradigms addressing their preconceived notions and focusing on their cultural perceptual maps and filters for the positive adjustment of not only students, but also themselves.

According to the National Education Association (2008) in addition to their standards, Alaska provides an all-encompassing approach to educators’ cultural competence which addresses the
preparation of culturally responsive teachers, culturally responsive school boards, nurturing culturally healthy children, respecting cultural knowledge, strengthening indigenous and world languages, and implementing cross-cultural programs. While this is commendable, the assessment piece is fundamental; it is essential to assess educators’ cultural competence and report findings so that subsequent to assessment and evaluation more informed decisions can be made to positively impact policy. We also assert that understanding aspects of family systems theory is not only the role of school psychologists and social workers, but also the role of the teachers and faculty in understanding family hierarchies, rules, roles, climate and equilibrium. These are fundamental and a must in ongoing teacher, faculty, and administrator training and development for building relationships and to open up effective communication with diverse students and diverse families to develop, enhance, and sustain active engagement with diverse students and diverse families for the success of all students.
References


WHY ARE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES LEAVING OUR INSTITUTIONS?”
BEYOND DEVELOPING ANOTHER PROGRAM

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Introduction

For at least the last ten years, Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) have been grappling with an overarching question, why are all the African-American males leaving our institutions? While this is a somewhat exaggerated statement, administrators, scholars, and faculty have continued to discuss the educational plight of African-American males in post-secondary institutions, especially at PWIs. The number of African-American males who do not return after their first-year or graduate from college is astounding; hence, many of these institutional discussions have centered on increasing their preparedness as well as their retention, persistence, and graduation rates. The solutions have typically come in the form of a new initiative or program. The challenge is that these programs are not being used by the African-American male students who actually need these initiatives.

The current research contributes to knowledge about factors related to low-levels of student success among African-American males at PWIs in their first-year. At the same time, the research aims to suggest ways to engage African-American males more in such support programs. A qualitative investigation was conducted to identify factors related to the overall success of these males. The qualitative methodology allows in-depth understanding and exploration of the issues under review as well as allows for the voices of those studied to be heard.

African-Americans at Predominately White Institutions

Generally, Black Colleges and Universities educated more than 90% of all African-American students enrolled in college prior to the mid-20th century (Kim & Conrad, 2006). However, this trend began to change in the early 1960s when pressure to desegregate white institutions of higher education (Kim & Conrad, 2006). This dramatic drop can be attributed to Supreme Court decisions and laws such as Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
As education integrated, many institutions were not ready to meet the needs of African-American students; as a result, African-Americans struggled at PWIs. Some authors report that there were a high level of dissatisfaction with integration, and protest and demonstrations by African-American students was a regular occurrence (Feagin et al., 1996 & Whiting, 1991). According to Pifer (1973), White students were hostile to Blacks and showed it resulting in chaos on many PWIs campuses. African-American students at PWIs became disillusioned by the slow progress of integration and their exclusion from campus social life, social fraternity membership and honor societies, and discriminatory treatment when seeking off-campus housing (Fleming, 1984). Of all the problems faced by African-American students on predominantly White campuses, the psychosocial problems resulting from alienation and a lack of support from the general environment seemed to be the most severe (Allen, 1981; Fleming, 1984). Consequently, it was noted that African-American students had a higher attrition rate and were not as academically successful as their Caucasian counterparts (Allen, 1981).

A 1972 study conducted by Willie and McCord (Fleming, 1984), claimed that the unanticipated level of prejudice and lack of social integration that African-American students found at PWIs contributed to feelings of anger and despair and the desire to separate and withdraw from Caucasians. Feagin et al. (1996) found that African-American students enrolled at PWIs continued to be dissatisfied to the extent that they believed protests against varied forms of racism were still needed and, thus, they organized events to bring awareness to their plight. In addition, Feagin et al. determined that African-American students at PWIs did not perform academically or adjust psychologically as well as their Caucasian counterparts to PWIs. They attributed this finding to their notion that racial barriers continued to exist at PWIs, where full desegregation of higher education remained more of a goal than reality. The most significant problem found for African-American students at PWIs was the growing feeling of alienation or the inability to feel part of a whole. Often these feelings of alienation seemed to be associated with lack of intellectual gain and a decrease in the level of career aspirations (Fleming, 1984; Feagin et al., 1996).

Students interviewed in a study conducted by Feagin et al. (1996) acknowledged feelings more or less of being unwelcomed at PWIs. When asked to respond to the statement, “X University (a PWI) is a college campus where Black students are generally welcomed and nurtured,” 89% of the students surveyed disagreed with the statement. For students who sensed they were not wanted, the college campus became an unfriendly place and was likely to have a negative impact on both self-esteem and personal identity. African-American students at PWIs periodically experienced racial insensitivity, hostility, and discrimination perpetrated by other students, and a range of campus personnel who sometimes left them feeling invisible (Feagin et al., 1996; Fleming, 1984; Sedlacek, 1987). Feagin et al. asserted that PWIs maintained racialized spaces which encompassed the cultural biases that helped define areas and territories as White or Black. These spaces resulted in feelings of belongingness and control, feelings which Caucasian students enjoyed; yet, were lacking for African-American students at PWIs. Feagin et al. (1996) purported that racial discrimination continued to be well entrenched in higher education in the United States, and for that reason African-American students enrolled in PWIs typically suffered dissatisfying college experiences. They concluded that African-American students enrolled in PWIs were the targets of varied forms of discrimination, ranging from blatant actions to subtle yet destructive practices which rendered it impossible for those students to have a rewarding
experience. Jones (2001) concluded that in order for African-Americans attending postsecondary institutions, particularly PWIs, to perform, persist, and graduate, a moderate to high level of social and academic integration into college life must exist.

It is evident that the racial composition of PWIs has made some dramatic changes; however, the curriculum as well as the racial composition of faculty has remained the same for the most part, and as a result, African-American students seek to construct their racial identities from flawed stereotypes portrayed in the media and pop culture (Adams, 2005). A survey conducted by Phillips (2005) measuring marginality compared the environmental perceptions of African-American and Caucasian students on a predominantly White campus. He found that African-American students felt marginalized and that Caucasian students were unaware of the different challenges faced by African-American students. The most common barriers seemed to be racial, socioeconomic, and academic issues. This marginalization caused great difficulty in a student’s ability to become academically or socially integrated in his/her environment (Adams, 2005; Phillips, 2005). Ultimately, Adams (2005) concluded that this feeling of marginalization leads to the perception that PWIs are indifferent, or even hostile, environments as it related to the African-American student experience and this perception attributed to lower retention and graduation rates of African-Americans in PWIs.

Despite African-Americans having increased access to PWIs, increasing their retention, persistence, and graduation rates has continued to be a national challenge. For those who do gain access to PWIs, they face many challenges that often hinder their opportunities for academic success (Cuyjet, 1997; Fleming, 1984; Polite & Davis, 1999). These challenges adversely affect African-American males at PWIs at very high rates (Davis, 1999; Polite & Davis, 1999).

### African-Americans Males in Higher Education

While the enrollment rates for African-American undergraduates has risen to 14% in 2008 from 10% in 1976, White males are enrolling at higher proportions than African-American males (Harper, 2006 & Strayhorn, 2008). In 1976, African-American males accounted for only 5% of all undergraduate students in the U.S., and in 2008, the percentage was still only 5% (Harper, 2006). Additionally, African-American males made up 3% of all graduate students in 1976, and the percentage is still currently at 3% (Harper, 2006). All studies seem to indicate that African-American males are enrolling, performing, and persisting at lower rates than any other racial group or gender (Noguera, 2003; Roach, 2001). National Center for Educational Statistics’ “The Condition of Education 2010” (2010) indicates that collegiate enrollment at the postsecondary level has increased from 13.1 million in 2000 to 16.4 million in 2008. At four-year institutions, female enrollment has increased by 32% and male enrollment by 28%. These increases are impressive, but a closer examination illustrates that, even with the increases, African-Americans lag far behind since only 14% of all college students are African-American compared to that of Caucasian students at 63%. The truncated number of African-American males who enroll in college further complicate a comprehensive understanding of the impact of their attrition rates. So many factors affect their educational experiences that it is difficult to gain an inclusive understanding of their educational difficulties as a group (Allen-Meares, 1999; Blake & Darling, 1994; Bryant, 2000). It becomes even more of a challenge when African-American females are showing great improvement in higher education participation. Of all ethnic groups, African-
Americans have the lowest female-male ratio (Jones, 2001). African-American females outnumber African-American males three to one at some higher education institutions (Bryant, 2000). In 2000, only 27.3% of African-American males matriculated to a higher education institution after graduating from high school. These percentages have shown declines since 1990 when it was 34% (Jones, 2001). African-American male higher education participation and academic success are on an unending downward spiral (Allen-Meares, 1999). African-American males who do manage to enroll at a higher education institution run a significant risk of not achieving academic success and obtaining a degree (Cuyjet, 2006).

Quantitative indicators of enrollment and attrition have generally been used to study African-American males in education, and there is a need for broader exploration (Cuyjet, 2006). On the contrary, there has been limited exploration about the qualitative experience of African-American male students (Ross, 1998). College and university campuses provide a useful context to examine the influence of factors, such as academic success, both within and beyond the bounds of university life (Cuyjet, 2006). In addition to generally using quantitative indicators, most of the research that seeks to understand African-American academic achievement has been comparative studies that tend to compare African-American student performances based on the experience of White American student performances. Although this research has helped to identify some reasons for academic failure, it does little to identify solutions to the issues, and it does not identify factors to contribute to academic success in higher education. This approach to understanding African-Americans in education is defected and problematic (Fisher, 1999).

In a study conducted by Hall and Rowan (2001), African-American male college students at PWIs were given several questions to answer designed to quantify their experiences in college. Overwhelmingly, these students indicated that the factor that most encouraged them to attend college was personal (N=543); familial influence ranked lowest (N=144). When asked about the special issues they faced, Race was the most significant issue (N= 809), followed by campus environment (N= 94). Campus environment, however, was the variable identified as the leading problem they had enrolling and staying in school (N=218). The significance of this study is it illustrates that even in the 21st century, African-American men on college campuses perceive both race and campus climate as obstacles in their collegiate success.

Some research attributed the disparities between African-American male and female gains to the belief that African-American females were more motivated about college attendance than their African-American male counterparts (Cokley, 2001). Others purported that the negative influences and stereotypes of society, exacerbated by the media, have taken hold on African-American males (Dancy, 2009; Steele 1992, 1997): “Black male college students feel pressured to fulfill media-spun social expectations to be overly sexual, aggressive and athletic in college” (Dancy, 2009, p. 21). Attempts to live up to these stereotypes pull African-American males further from academic success and collegiate adjustment (Dancy, 2009; Steele, 1992).

Perry (1993) argues that in order for African-American students to achieve academic success in predominately White academic environments they must successfully be engaged with at least three different groups. The groups that Perry believes to be essential are engagement with a group that has experience with dealing with oppression and discrimination (preferably their own ethnic group), some level of engagement with the majority group, and lastly, engagement with a
group that offers an alternative to the majority dominant cultural values (Berry, 2002). According to Perry, engagement with each of these particular groups offers African-American students specific knowledge and skills to promote a sound academic environment that will lead to academic success. African-American student success depends on the student being comfortable in multiple cultures and being able to move between them (Perry, 1993). Typically, educational institutions have disregarded the importance of cultural adaptability as an important contributing factor for academic success (Berry, 2002; Perry, 1993). African-American students who develop adaptive skills and strategies across cultural frames are more apt to be academically successful. In contrast, those students who have difficulty navigating between cultural frames will likely experience academic difficulty (Berry, 2002; Perry, 1993).

In Tinto's (1993) research, he argues that African-American students confront challenges and obstacles that make academic and social integration increasingly difficult at traditionally White institutions (TWI). Many African-American cultural values and social norms are incongruent with the social life at TWIs. This incongruence makes it difficult for students to find supportive communities within these institutions. When African-Americans are unable to find support in the academic environment, it can adversely affect their overall academic performance (Jones, 2001). Tinto (1993) found that African-Americans most often utilized cultural students' organizations as the means by which they were able to begin the process of social integration into the campus community. The findings of several scholars, such as Bird (1996), DeSousa & Kuh, (1996) and Fleming (1984), confirm the importance of cultural organizations, fraternities, and sororities to African-American student retention and matriculation.

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine the perceptions held by African-American males at a PWI about their experience in their first-year of college as a means to understanding how to enhance their academic success at that particular higher education institution. The guiding question for this qualitative research study was: What is the experience of first-year African-American male college students who did not achieve academic success at a public four-year PWI in Southwest Georgia?

This study used African-American male college students who have completed at least one full year of college at a predominately White institution in Southwestern Georgia. The institution had a student population of approximately 3,046 students, of which approximately 868 were African-American at the time of the study. The criteria for this sample were African-American males 18 years old and older who have been enrolled for at least one full academic year and have a grade point average below 2.0. Additionally, the eligible participants only consisted of traditional students or students who began college within two years of graduating high school. This group was selected because the study focused on the experience of African-American males only. African-American male students who were enrolled in any remediation courses in their first-year of college were not eligible to participate in this study.
There were ten African-American males in this qualitative study, each with a grade point average below 2.0 at the end of their first-year of study at a predominately White institution in Southwestern Georgia. A code name was assigned to each participant, and they are as follow: MH3, MH6, MH1, OU12, OU85, OU7, AF84, AF2, AF11 and AF33. The code names represent a building on campus and his favorite number. Each participant ranged in age from 18 to 19 years, attended college full time, and resided in campus housing. Eight of the participants qualified for financial aid while the other two paid tuition and fees out-of-pocket. Only two participants had both parents/guardians who had attained at least an undergraduate degree; four participants had one parent to attain at least an undergraduate, and the others’ parents/guardians did not attain an undergraduate degree nor had any college experience.

FINDINGS

Five main themes related to the experience of African-American males who did not achieve academic success in their first-year of college at this predominately White institution in Southwest Georgia. Themes associated with the experience of African-American males not achieving academic success are as follows: (1) Engaging with Others (2) Lack of Support (3) Usage of Resources (4) Unprepared for Transition and (5) Impact of Racism. However, for the purpose of this article, the researchers are exploring the third theme of why African-American males do not achieve academic success.

Usage of Resources

A theme that emerged from the interviews was the usage of the university’s resources. The university understands that it is important to have support services for students. This is evident by the number of different services that they provide for students to have the added support needed to perform academically and grow personally. The university’s student support services include, but are not limited to tutoring, first-year experience services, counseling services, writing lab and academic skills workshops. Additionally, there are a number of organizations and clubs specifically available for students to join. However, many participants did not utilize these services during their first-year experience.

This theme of usage of the university’s resources and its relationship to the first-year experience surfaced from all participants. However, some of the participants were not even aware of many of the services. For example, when asked, “Are you aware of the academic resources available to you on campus?” MH6 shared, “I did not know the school had all of those resources available for students.” MH1 answered the same question with this comment: “All this time I spent struggling and you mean to tell me they have all those resources here, at this school. Man, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out where to get help.”

On the other hand, some participants acknowledged that they knew of the resources, but simply failed to use them. AF84 stated:

Yeah, I am aware of those resources, but I didn’t use them. I mean I thought I could manage on my own. The crazy thing is though I use to go over to that building all the
time where they do the workshops, but I never even thought about going in and getting help. I thought they probably would be boring.

In reference to the academic resources, OU85 said:

I knew they had these resources, but I never thought about going. When I was in high school only the slow students would get tutoring and all kind of stuff like that. But even if I would have went they probably would not have been able to help me anyway and that would have just frustrated me more.

Then there were the participants who were aware of the resources and actually had some experience with using them. Take OU7, who stated:

I did go to one of the workshops. It was on time management. It helped me somewhat, but the stuff they were telling us in the workshop seemed to be unrealistic. It was like they really wanted your boy to schedule when he gone eat, when he gone sleep, and stuff. Who knows when they are going to fall asleep? So, I did try, but it didn’t help too much.

A different point of view about the effectiveness of the resources came from AF2’s experience. He expressed his opinion about some of the resources:

The resources that I used did help me especially the note taking workshop that I went to. It provided me with some good ways to take notes. It also helped me learn how to organize my notes too. I went to tutoring a few times as well. My tutor helped me out, but she sometimes didn’t show so I stop going. But I can say when she did come she did help me.

Tutoring. Participants were not shy about sharing their experiences about specific services that were provided as resources. Tutoring was the underlying resource on which participants’ focused their comments. AF33 had a previous negative experience with tutoring, which tarnished his perception of tutoring all together. He expressed it this way:

When I was in high school I use to go to tutoring every day because my mom had me in this after school tutoring program. I use to get the tutoring for math and me and my tutor went over a whole chapter in a week helping me to prepare for an exam. I really thought I was gone do good because I was working all the problems like my tutor. When I got my test I worked out all the problems with no problem, well at least I thought I did. I made a 22 on that test. It turns out my tutor was showing me wrong the whole time and I vowed then never to go to tutoring again.

OU12 expressed similar concerns about tutoring; he stated it this way: “I am not a big fan of tutors because sometimes they be wrong, but they don’t like to admit it.”

Contrariwise, other participants made positive comments about tutoring. For instance,
MH1 expressed his feelings about tutoring by saying, “I know tutoring would have been helpful to me. I always thought tutoring was good a resource, for math especially.” And AF11 stated: “Tutoring probably would have been good for me because I tutored in high school and I know it is probably really good tutors in college.” Yet, OU85 perhaps gave the most elaborate positive comment about tutoring with this expression:

It’s funny that I didn’t use the tutoring services here in my first-year because I know how much tutors can help. Back in my hometown I use to tutor at our boys and girls club and the kids use to always tell me how good they felt after they would get it the concept. On top of that tutoring would have allowed me to begin to interact with other students here on campus. I made a lot of friends through tutoring at that boys and girls club.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicated that African-American males who did not achieve academic success in their first-year of college at a PWI had many different experiences. Some of these experiences were directly related to their poor academic performance. For the African-American male participants in this study, describing their first-year experience was based on self-reflection. Participants had to identify experiences that impacted them individually during that first-year of college. No two participants’ experiences were the same. Each of the students described a variety of situations and conditions they had to deal with to convey their experiences. Many of their situations were similar, but none was the same. The conditional matrix for each participant varied as well. Therefore, no single experience could be identified as the underlying factor to the participants’ poor academic performance during the first-year. The researcher came to the conclusion that there are several contributing factors to poor academic performance amongst African-American males at the PWI during the first-year.

Support services for students are a critical component to addressing the needs of students in college. At this PWI, they offer a wide range of support services for students, but the participants did not take advantage of them. Some participants did not know the services existed while others knew, but decided not to use them. Tutoring seemed to stir up mix feelings with the participants as some of them felt tutoring was a good support service while others did not. Due to a previous negative experience with tutoring, AF33 developed a tarnished perception of the entire idea as a whole. Participants did acknowledge that the use of the provided resources could have enhanced their experience during the first-year as well as help improve academic performance. MH1 stated:

I know if I would have used some of those services you just named I would have done much better in my classes. I probably would have also gotten some good information from those workshops too. Man those resources probably would have made my life a lot easier last year.

Bryant’s (2000) article supports the notion that the use of resources or support services will enhance African-American males’ academic performance and their overall educational experience.
Transition problems materialized with seven of the ten participants. These participants reported major issues being prepared emotionally and academically for college. Participants reported homesickness and difficulty with the academic rigor of college. Zhang and Smith (2011) found that African-American males have difficulty transitioning to college because of inadequate preparation during high school. MH1 referred to an experience he had with his high school counselor about transition, but he ignored it. He went on to describe how he wished he would have taken advantage of the opportunity. In addition, understanding the responsibility of being a college student was experienced as well. OU7 stated, “…I struggled with getting up for class.” The statement went into further detail about how his mother would be the person to wake him up for school at home. In addition, participants found that they were not prepared academically for college. MH3 reported, “… professors expected us to know a lot of stuff that I just did not know.” Conversely, participants’ academic performance suffered.

The results clearly show that there was a cultural disconnect between the institution and the participants. Participants in this study described their academic environments prior to college as inclusive and engaging. According to Irvin (1990), campus environments influence the overall educational experience a student will have. Participants reported a need to interact with others, build relationships, and connect and engage in social activities during their first-year experience at the PWI. However, during their first-year, they found the environment to be isolating and uninviting. As a result, participants were not prepared to adjust to a foreign environment. Engagement was perceived as a means to build the relationship as necessary to create a learning environment where learning was not seen as menial, but as exciting. According to participants, the desire of the professor to interact with them in the classroom was perceived as their test to determine if communication of any kind was possible—inside or outside of the classroom. AF84 reported trying to connect with his professors in the classroom as well as in the office, but said he still felt a sense of disconnect. He stated, “I did not get the kind of connection with my professors as I would have hoped during class. Most of them weren’t engaging even when I was in their office.”

During their respective interviews, all participants spoke about resources and student support services that were available to them during their first-year. While there was some degree of divergence when participants utilized the resources, the consensus reported that they were not aware of the services or simply did not use them. Consistent with this notion, Lee and Ransom’s (2011) article identifies failure to seek support services and resources as one of the challenges African-American males face in higher education which hinders them from achieving academic success. Similarly, Bryant (2000), Cuyjet, (2006) and Jones (2001) findings were consistent with this present study. They indicated that African-American males who do not seek or use support services have challenges performing academically in college. However, not all participants neglected support services. Some participants actually used some of the support services available to them, but still did not perform well academically. AF2 discussed how effective he felt some of the services he used were; yet, he still did not perform well academically. He stated:

The resources I used helped me out. Especially, the note taking workshop I attended, but I still did not do well as I needed to in my classes. Even the class I had the tutor for I failed it. The tutor was good, but I just didn’t do enough to pass the class. I still have to say the services worked for me [sic] cause they helped me.
There is limited literature to support the finding of ineffective support services to the African-American male college population and it is hard to generalize; but the researcher found it noteworthy to mention because it contradicts previous literature.

Although there were a number of resources and student support services available to the African-American males in this study at the institution, tutoring seemed to surface more than any other specific service being offered. The participants had mixed feelings about tutoring. As mentioned above, AF2 felt that his tutor was very helpful, but others reported negative comments about tutoring. The literature does not speak directly to the effectiveness or helpfulness that tutoring provides to African-American males at PWIs; however, Lee’s (2009) study focuses on collaborative learning of African-American males at a PWI, and the researcher considers tutoring a form of collaborative learning. The findings in Lee’s study suggest that student collaborations can be effective with African-American males at PWIs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having worked in higher education for many years, this is a challenging presupposition; however, with the number of colleges/universities that exist today, students, including African-American males, have many options. It is imperative that institutions particularly those that seek to create programs that work with African-American males see them as valuable customers. Based on this research and over a decade of work with African-American males directly, we recommend that colleges and universities consider the following thoughts and recommendations. Why do African-American males not participate in success programs?

1. The program(s) has a negative reputation. Because African-American males are very guarded about being “singled out”, being in a “special program” or needing help, they resist using these success programs often label them with negative terms. The way an institution frames and markets the program goes a long way for its usage.

2. They don’t understand what you do. Though most institutions admit students who are well-prepared for College, the challenge is that colleges/universities are very complex and confusing environments, especially for first-generation African-American male students. Names for offices, such as The Academic Success Center, Center of Student Engagement, Office of Experiential Education and Civic Engagement, and First-year Student Success, seem obvious for the average student, but can be confusing for new African-American male students.

3. They don’t think you are truly concerned about them. Students, especially first-generation African-American males, are very perceptive. They take cue from the administration and staff, especially those who work with them directly. They can easily detect whether a person is really concerned about their success or if they are just doing their job. Because of their environments and experiences, African-American males develop early an ability to read body language, analyze conversations, and assess a person’s motives.
4. They see no value in your services. Most initiatives and services that take place on a campus do so with very little input from the people they serve; hence, the services do not reflect the students’ needs. Asking them to assess the services and make recommendations for improving them would go a long way to increasing the number of students utilizing the services.

5. Your office is not warm and inviting. If an African-American male student comes into an office that is intended to help students and do not see people that either look like or have a shared experience as him, he is very likely not to return to that office in the future. It is important that African-American males find the environment not only useful but welcoming.

The student, regardless of ethnicity or gender, aspect of higher education should be paramount. Rule #1: Students are the life blood of a college or university. They can exist without Presidents, Provosts, Vice Presidents, Directors, etc., but they cannot exist without faculty and students, and faculty members are not needed if there no students. Once we think that way, we realize our institutions are our students. Putting all the attention on new buildings on our campuses, the new system that our institution has purchased, or emphasizing athletic programs, we leave out the most important piece: the student. Keeping students in mind, particularly African-American male students since that is the context of this article, here are some recommendations to retain, persist, and graduate African-American male students.

1. Remember to put yourself in their shoes. Often times we as adults forget what we wore, what types of music we listened to, the types of dances we did, or the things we said and did when we were young. Nevertheless, we are now advisors, coordinators, directors, vice presidents, provosts, presidents, and professors. African-American male students are on a journey called life. Where they are now is not where they will be in the future. African-American males are looking for relatable not perfect people.

2. Realize that it is important to give them the respect that they deserve. Do you think you can get by providing the least support, ignoring their uniqueness, and treating them as if they are invisible on your campus? It will show in your retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Colleges/Universities do not retain students…people do.

3. Show them your Real Side. If they see you as having done everything right, would they be able to connect to you? Could they identify with your experiences? An administrator who is willing to be transparent with students regarding their challenges, such as financial difficulties, low performance in a course, or other obstacles, while they were in college makes them an asset.

4. See them as on a Journey. Closely linked to #1 is the idea that we see them on the journey to becoming adults. Although they may possess the physical and physiological characteristics of being a “male”, they are still developing the maturity and reasoning ability to be a “man”.

The student, regardless of ethnicity or gender, aspect of higher education should be paramount.
5. Listen to them. The fact that an African-American male student thought enough of you to share his challenge with you is all you need to know in trying to listen to them. Remember you do not want to tell them what to do. You want to ask probing questions to get them to understand the ramifications of and to look at the various issues to their decision.

6. Reward them. Last, but certainly not least, it may be an exception from your university policy, but find some way to just reward African-American males for doing well. For individuals who, as a group, are not typically, positively, acknowledged, it is most meaningful for them to be saluted for their scholastic successes. For example, have a pizza party to celebrate those who were retained from their freshmen to sophomore year or develop a commemorative t-shirt acknowledging their academic success.

Conclusion

This study explored the first-year experience of African-American African-Americans males who did not achieve academic success at a PWI in Southwestern Georgia. The African-American males in this study have strong resolve to overcome their first-year academic mishaps. They have found a place to fit in on the campus by joining one of two African-American male organizations that provides support and direction for these young African-American men. The researcher is hopeful that these men are on the right track to achieve academic success.

The study clearly stated that African-American males need to be nurtured in a culturally inclusive environment and have a strong support system during the first-year of college. It is this researcher’s belief that this will be a significant portion of the academic success formula for this population. Furthermore, the grass root of the African-American male’s ability to achieve academically, overcome stereotypes, perceptions, and other daily obstacles is the consistent support of family, faculty, staff, and mentors in their lives. Concurrently, these men must believe they can take control of their education despite the odds they are facing. They have to make strategic choices about their priorities and develop long-term and short-term goals for accountability purposes.
References


COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ON THE MARGINS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS

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ABSTRACT

Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) suggest that content knowledge and basic skills, core academic skills, non-cognitive or behavioral skills, and college knowledge are the four key skills necessary for students to be college-ready. “While policymakers at the national, state, and local levels have endorsed the movement to raise academic rigor and demand college and career readiness for all students, the stark reality is that the educational pipeline loses far too many young people before they can even enter postsecondary education” (Hooker & Brand, 2010, p. 75). Of particular concern are the marginalized students. This manuscript focuses on those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Black males, with implications for school counselors.

(Key words: College, career, Black males, Low-income)

Introduction

In the current age of accountability, educational reform, and the struggling economy, there is an increased need for students to graduate from high school and pursue higher education. In recent decades, Americans have seen an increasingly globalized economy and a reduction in domestic manufacturing jobs, which had once sustained the nation’s working class. In the next decade, however, occupations that require postsecondary education are expected to grow at significantly higher rates than jobs requiring less educational attainment (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009).
Only 23 percent of students graduating in 2009 in the United States met the college readiness benchmarks for English, math, reading, and science, according to data from ACT (2009). The concern for equity, economic stability, and international competitiveness gives the American education system the large responsibility of working to close achievement and opportunity gaps for previously marginalized groups in the United States, such as minority groups and individuals from low socioeconomic status. The nation’s focus is now on increasing the percentage of students across all subgroups that will be prepared for postsecondary education and employment (Martinez & Klopott, 2005). To that end, school counselors can be critical to ensuring that all students are “college-ready” and “career-ready” before they graduate from high school.

School counselors are expected to provide the opportunity for students to develop an awareness of careers, foster students’ ability to find career information, and help students search for and attain achievable goals (ASCA National Model, 2004). The challenges between and within groups are unique, and awareness of such along with targeted efforts is critical. Of many groups warranting specific attention, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Black males appear to be at a further disadvantage. Critical to the overall improvement of such groups on the margins is a shift in focus to the facilitated empowerment of these students. “Empowerment can be defined as a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations” (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, p. 40). Empowerment theory, which has roots in early feminist theory, is often used when counseling minorities or other populations who may face oppression from society (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee, 2007). Through their data-driven comprehensive programming, school counselors are key to ensuring that the empowerment of these students on the margins are the priority instead of the deficits that are correlated with them being there.

**College-and Career-Readiness**

Before examining the barriers to students on the margins, namely students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Black males, it is important to first discuss college and career readiness and what that entails. Conley (2007) defines college readiness as the level of preparation and skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses at a postsecondary institution without the need for remedial coursework. Despite the new age of accountability and the various tactics for strengthening school systems, Kirst and Bracco (2004) conclude that almost half of the students who enter higher education and approximately two-thirds of students who attend community college must enroll in remedial courses and programs. Many of the skills that are crucial in determining a student’s success in postsecondary education are unrelated to knowledge in content area. Instead, cognitive strategies such as interpretation, problem solving, and reasoning have been consistently identified as being even more important than specific content knowledge (Conley, 2007). Large differences often exist between the amount and type of reading and writing required in high school versus college classes as well as the analytic and thinking skills required, according to Conley (2007). In order to help students develop these skills, the school counselor can work towards systemic change, particularly for teachers to develop these critical thinking skills in high and lower level classes.
As far as career readiness is concerned, students need to be able to apply academics in the context of situations they may face in their careers. Some of these skills are the same abilities that allow for success in college. These abilities include: core academic skills such as writing, research skills, oral communication skills, and general logic and analytic thinking skills, which are not necessarily subject-specific but are crucial to the success in college, future careers, and in a wide variety of disciplines. The current accountability system tends to focus more on content area than critical thinking skills as demonstrated by the state issued standardized tests. Students who come from middle to upper class backgrounds tend to have more exposure to a variety of experiences and have parents who are more likely to push towards mastering critical thinking skills (Ward, 2006). Upon close examination, there appears to be a gap in the system where students are not learning the skills necessary for them to be prepared for the challenges of college and careers as well as an additional achievement gap based on SES and race.

In addition to subject-focused content knowledge and cognitive strategies, academic behaviors including self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control are behaviors necessary for academic success. Also, mastery of skills such as study and organizational skills are critical for college success, including mastery of key material and successful completion of academic tasks (Conley, 2007). Study skill behaviors incorporate necessary skills such as time management, exam preparation, seeking and using resources, taking notes, and communicating with teachers. Furthermore, the ability to work with others, coordinate and recognize the importance of study groups, and successfully participate in study groups is a study skill behavior that may contribute to college success. Many of these academic behaviors also allow students to prioritize study time in relation to work or social activities. Strong interpersonal skills and social skills also enable students to interact with a diverse group of professors and peers, thus enhancing success in college (Martinez & Klopott, 2005).

Research has found that students also need to have an understanding of the complex college admission and selection process, the academic requirements for college work, the options available to them, how to pay for postsecondary education, and the cultural differences that exist between high school and postsecondary education (Hooker & Brand, 2010). Although many students aspire to attend a four-year college and understand the opportunities an advanced degree will allow, they have little understanding of the academic and social preparation necessary to actually enter a four-year college and to be successful in such a setting. Many students also do not receive counseling on the range of postsecondary options or are given limited guidance on how their individual academic plan matches their postsecondary aspirations (Hooker & Brand, 2010). This important information, or “college knowledge,” includes thorough understanding of college admissions, testing and curricular requirements, application processes, college options and choices, tuition costs and financial aid, college culture and course rigor, and expectations and necessity of increased higher education (Conley, 2007). Furthermore, the access, or lack of access, to this knowledge can create opportunity gaps.

Students on the Margins

Research indicates that youth in low-income, inner-city schools are at risk for limited career options, reduced earnings potential, and low educational attainment (Jackson, Kacanski, Rust, &
Beck, 2006). Students from this underrepresented group are often less likely to have role models who have attended college, and there may be less college knowledge in their communities (Hooker & Brand, 2010). In addition to skill deficits or barriers to information, families and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often lack the aspirations, internal and external supports, or the beliefs that they are able to attain higher levels of education (Akos, Lambie, Milsom, & Gilbert, 2007).

There are multiple factors that increase the risk of poor academic achievement outcomes among low socioeconomic populations, including racial bias, peer group influence, parenting practices, parental involvement, poorer quality instruction and low teacher expectations for minority children, limited school resources, and less rigorous academic coursework (Ward, 2006). Research consistently reports that in schools in urban areas, large schools, and schools that disproportionately serve students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students are less likely to have access to the resources necessary to become college-ready (Cooper & Liou, 2007). These students are also less likely to be enrolled in academic tracks and rigorous courses necessary for college preparation (Akos, et al., 2007; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009).

Barriers to college knowledge and the college application process create difficulties for obtaining college- and career-readiness among low-income and minority students. According to Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009), low-income and minority students who have similar academic qualifications to their high-income white peers are more likely to attend two-year college and less likely to attend a four-year college. Therefore, it is evident that barriers exist beyond academic achievement. Successfully attending college requires knowledge of the complex application process as well as the financial aid process, which is being recognized as a significant barrier for students. According to the American Council on Education (2004), low-income students are more likely than middle-income students to file the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) after the deadline, which significantly reduces the amount of aid that can be obtained. Additionally, approximately 850,000 students who would most likely be eligible for a Pell Grant never even file a FAFSA (American Council on Education, 2004). Furthermore, 14 percent of dependent and 17 percent of independent low-income, full-time students do not apply for aid.

Parental factors also impact academic achievement and success among students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. It is not that parents of low socioeconomic status are uninvolved in their child’s academic achievement efforts, in actuality the parental absence may in fact be the result of structural barriers or lack of resources that make involvement difficult or impossible (Lee & Bowen, 2006). For example, many low SES homes are headed by a single mother who may have an inflexible work schedule, limited transportation, and younger children that make it difficult to attend informational meetings or parent conferences that often occur at schools in the evenings and on weeknights (Smith, 2009). Furthermore, parents may lack resources, such as internet access or financial means to assist children with academics or online applications. Also, parents who may not have graduated from high school themselves lack the academic skills to help their children and lack knowledge of the college process.

According to the U. S. Census Bureau (2010), 27.4% of the Black population is living in poverty, which is the highest rate out of all ethnic groups. While the Black population is at risk for not developing college and career readiness skills, Black males, in particular, are at risk of
not receiving equitable educational and career opportunities. Statistics related to academic achievement, graduation rate, incarceration, college matriculation and career achievement of Black males are indicative of a serious issue with the education and preparation of these students (Wyatt, 2009).

Black males have historically been an underserved population within education. Per Jenkins (2006), 57% of Black males were unable to read in 1900, and in 2001 44% remained illiterate, according to data taken from the U.S. Census. Consequently, Black males lag behind their counterparts in academic achievement (Baker, 2005; Noguera, 2003). The disengagement of Black males from education often occurs by the time they are in 4th grade (Noguera, 2003). This should be disconcerting for all who work with this population. Jenkins (2006) posits that Black males are disproportionately represented among those students who are forced to withdraw, have low academic performance, and, for those who persist to college, report negative college experiences. All such data lends further credence to concerns about an educational crisis affecting Black males (Hendrie, 1998).

According to Stearns, Potochnick, Moller, and Southworth (2010), students who pursue an advanced course of study (e.g. Advanced placement, etc.) are more likely to be better prepared for college than those who do not. Knowing this, it is a troubling notion to observe that Black males are the least likely (amongst Blacks and Whites of both genders) to take advanced courses. The psychological, social, physical, and personal burdens that Black males carry must be considered if the educational disparity is to improve.

There is an ample amount of research on the disadvantages that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Black males face in their academic and career development and achievement (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). However, there is a lack of research on what can be done to improve the career development of this population (Robinson & Reio Jr., 2012). Best practices regarding the empowerment of this group are needed in the literature on the topic. School counselors, leaders in the use of data and evidence-based practices to improve educational equity, are key to adding to this body of knowledge.

**Implications for School Counselors**

Turner and Ziebell (2011) posit that students believe their success is not related to their efforts in school. This implies that there are other factors beyond their control that inhibit their success academically as well as career development. This feeling of powerlessness is fairly common in minority groups due to overt and covert forms of oppression that still exist despite the efforts to expunge them. The literature often focuses on negative stereotypes which disproportionately affect Black males and the lack of culturally competent supports for these students. (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). While it is important to have an awareness of an individual’s lack of resources, it is just as important to address the strengths of an individual and how he can use those strengths to overcome obstacles.

Empowerment theory, which has roots in early feminist theory, is often used when counseling minorities or other populations who may face oppression from society (Hipolito-Delgado & Lee,
2007). The driving force behind this theory is to facilitate the empowerment of the client, which Gutierrez (1995) defines as “the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families and communities can take action to improve their situations” (p. 229). The three types of power listed by Gutierrez (1995) represent control of oneself, equity in relationships with others, and the power to make systemic change. One of the most distinguishing features of this theory is the counseling relationship, which is viewed as a partnership, thus, giving the client more control by eliminating power differentials.

So how can school counselors help facilitate the empowerment of their students, particularly those on the margins? Afterschool groups directed at Black male students have produced positive behaviors related to attendance, discipline referrals and academics (Martin, Martin, Gibson & Wilkins, 2007; Wyatt, 2009). In particular, high school counselor Shelby Wyatt developed an afterschool group called The Brotherhood which shows very promising results (Wyatt, 2009). The group is geared towards Black male students who were at risk for dropping out of school and focused on themes such as collaboration, leadership, and student advocacy – all of which serve as the foundations of empowerment. Those who are part of the Brotherhood perform 48%-60% higher academically than those who are nonmembers (Wyatt, 2009). This study indicates that the application of empowerment theory through group counseling can be a successful approach to help Black male students who are endeavoring to overcome unique educational challenges. A group setting allows for idea sharing for students who are in the same stage of exploring potential career options (Kerr & Sodano, 2003). Through the group counseling format, students can elicit the support of similar peers, weigh potential career options as a group, and make their way through the goal setting stages of career development by providing feedback to one another (Kerr & Sodano, 2003). One of principles that make up Wyatt’s group that pertain to the empowerment of these young men is the opportunity to develop leadership skills. For instance, allowing a different group member to lead a discussion once a week will not only help develop leadership skills and give him a sense of power, it will also help develop those critical thinking skills that are essential in college and career readiness. Also, letting the group members decide what direction they want the group to go in further empowers the members and creates a sense of equity among the group members.

Another useful addition to such a group is bringing in speakers of similar background who are currently in college or are professionals within the community. This way, the students will be able to interact with a role model who can explain how they got to where they are and how they overcame the obstacles along the way. This can give the students a sense of new possibilities and can also help them build networks. Seeing individuals who are successful is an excellent way for these students to realize that they are not stuck with one path or future and most importantly, that they have the ability to change their own lives.

A final form of empowerment is gaining power through systemic change (Gutierrez, 1995). This is a perfect opportunity for the school counselor to help the group brainstorm ways they could achieve change in their environment, whether it is the school or the community. It could be something simple as using the creative arts to raise the awareness of the faculty on their perspective. Encouraging and facilitating historically disenfranchised groups to begin this dialogue with the school could bring about systemic change and more ideal conditions for these students to thrive. It also allows the students to realize that they have the ability to change their
environment, and more importantly, they can change their response to the environmental conditions which may be beyond their control.

In addition to the powerful impact of group work on improving college and career readiness in students on the margins, school counselors can also facilitate the empowerment of students via individual planning. The Brotherhood program developed academic, career and personal/social goals with their participants, and feedback from post-program surveys showed that the students found these goals very helpful in their development (Wyatt, 2009). This program led to school counselors’ reevaluation of the 4-year plan at their school and the creation of a new program designed to improve college readiness (Wyatt, 2009). Throughout this process, it is critical for school counselors to honor the respective culture of students and provide opportunities for social capital attainment with which to succeed in postsecondary life. It is necessary for the school counselor to develop a partnership with students and allow them to have ownership of their career planning process (Greene, 2006). In the early stages of career planning, the school counselor should focus on the student’s interests and strengths and help the student plan academic courses or opportunities based on these strengths and interests. Determining the strengths of a student allows for awareness and can be a good opportunity to discuss how the student can uses these skills to overcome obstacles and further define them.

**Conclusion**

During a time of increased need for effective practices and the promotion of college- and career-readiness among students, school counselors and other school professionals have been called to advocate for disenfranchised groups who experience fewer opportunities and lower aspirations for educational attainment and career success. Although this article focused primarily on two groups of students, those from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Black males, many of the strategies proposed can be applied to all groups that reside on the margins. Through the ideals of empowerment theory, the school counselor can create a group setting that helps students build support and connects as well as gives them access to vital information and power. By creating and facilitating a safe environment for these students to gain power, school counselors can improve future outcomes of individuals who have historically been systematically and systemically oppressed.

Given such unique challenges to an increasingly diverse population, it is imperative that school counselors consider the ecology of students when implementing comprehensive programs to address student needs. Doing so aids in delivering services that truly promote equity, access, and social justice in schools, as transformed school counselors are charged to do.
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