JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

EDUCATING BLACK AND LATINO MALES

Adapted from *Educating Black and Latino Males: Striving for Educational Excellence and Equity, July 2012*

OVERVIEW

"On all of the indicators of academic achievement, educational attainment, and school success, African-American and Latino males are noticeably distinguished from other segments of the American population by their consistent clustering at the bottom (Schott 2010). With few exceptions, these dismal patterns exist in urban, suburban, and rural school districts throughout the United States. Nationally, African-American and Latino males are more likely than any other group to be suspended and expelled from school (Fergus & Noguera 2010). In most American cities, dropout rates for African-American and Latino males are well above 50 percent, and they're less likely to enroll in or graduate from college than any other group (Schott 2010). (Summarized by Pedro Noguera in the February 2012 issue of Phi Delta Kappan.*)*

These patterns have become so common and widespread that a recitation of the numbers no longer generates alarm or even surprise. The real danger is that too many educators and too many members of the public at large have begun to accept this dismal state of affairs as the norm. The most important underlying challenge is to undermine that acceptance and create a new norm in which the facts are no longer acceptable, or worse yet, expected as a matter of course.

The following touchstones, as well as the implications for practice they suggest, have emerged from thinking about how best to accelerate the school engagement and academic achievement of males of color—and in the process, undermine the too-often accepted norm of their disengagement and underachievement. This "way forward" is informed in large part by Noguera's "Six Essentials for Educating Black and Latino Students" and Dr. Stephen Peters' "Do You Know Enough About Me to Teach Me?" Each of these touchstones has implications for the three areas on which Noguera focuses in his framework: structure, culture, and agency.

TOUCHSTONE #1: UNCONSCIOUS BIASES, FEARS, AND ASSUMPTIONS ARE OBSTACLES TO SCHOOL SUCCESS

The Problem:

Biases, fears, and deeply held assumptions about black and Latino males work against their success. As Noguera would have it, "The biggest obstacle to students' success is the adults who believe they cannot succeed and the behaviors that follow from that belief " (Boykin & Noguera 2010). There is also a growing body of evidence that as boys of color grow older,

these biases, fears, and assumptions grow more pronounced and are internalized in the form of "the stereotype threat," leading them to underperform in a manner consistent with the stereotype (Steele & Aronson 1995).

For boys and young men of color, often disconnected from the world of schooling, Herbert Kohl's "thoughts on the role of assent in learning" are particularly prescient in this regard. He reminds us that "not-learning," or refusal to learn, is often the direct result of a student's intelligence, dignity, or integrity being compromised by a teacher, an institution, or a larger social mindset (Kohl 1992).

Indeed, contemporary studies point time and again to the perception on the part of boys of color that the most important variable in their decision to apply themselves to a particular subject matter or engage in a particular activity is whether or not the teacher, coach, mentor, or activity leader seems to care about them as people (Boykin & Noguera 2010). An overwhelming number of school-successful men of color trace the genesis of their success to one teacher or mentor with whom they developed a strong bond.

Key Implications for Practice:

- Tackle head-on the negative effects of unconscious bias towards males of color. Ensure that all administrators, teachers, coaches, mentors, and support personnel are culturally competent; that they actually believe and are able to demonstrate explicit and sincere affirmations of the academic and professional abilities of black and Latino males; and that they have established bias- and stereotype threat-free classrooms and communities through systematic, embedded staff development for administrators, coaches, teachers, mentors, and support staff.

- Expect the discomfort and resistance (from all stakeholders) that always precedes the disruption of deeply held beliefs.

- Recruit and retain more black and Latino males as administrators, teachers, coaches, mentors, and support personnel.

- Work to create a counter-narrative; one that describes youth as capable of greatness through work and perseverance. Many disconnected youth come into programs fighting negative stereotypes and carrying baggage from past failures. A counter-narrative has to be cultivated and consistent.

- Learn about growth mindset and work with youth to cultivate a growth mindset. There is research now that shows how a growth mindset can have a positive effect on combating stereotype threats (Aronson, Fried, and Good 2002; Good, Aronson, and Inzlicht 2003). Their studies found that negatively stereotyped students (such as girls in math, or black and Latino students in math and verbal areas) showed substantial benefits from being taught growth mindset. Stereotypes are the equivalent to fixed-mindset labels. They imply that the trait or ability in question is fixed and that some groups have it and others don't. The growth mindset portrays abilities as acquirable and sends a particularly encouraging message to students who have been negatively stereotyped—one that they respond to with renewed motivation and engagement.

- Create a community of practice in which administrators, teachers, coaches, support personnel, and mentors are challenged to respect and empathize with students and families and the communities in which they live.

- Routinely work with direct service personnel on the use of insights from theories of development (cognitive, socio-cultural, emotional, moral, racial and ethnic identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and constructions of masculinity) to better understand student behaviors and as evidence in instruction and scaffolding. Many student behaviors, when viewed in isolation from their developmental context, can reinforce unconscious bias and stereotypes.

- Support the engagement of direct service personnel and students in informal, spontaneous interactions as well as in formal classroom and coaching activities. Positive relations between teachers and students bolster student empowerment and engagement; this is especially true for students of color (Ada and Campoy 2004).

- Provide personalized learning environments with mentors, counseling, and other supports from the neighborhoods and communities in which students live.

TOUCHSTONE #2: ENTRENCHED INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES LIMIT OPPORTUNITIES FOR MALE STUDENTS OF COLOR

The Problem:

Entrenched institutional practices limit opportunities for many black and Latino boys and young men. Male students of color are traditionally underrepresented in gifted and honors classes and overrepresented in remedial classes and special education. Boys of color are suspended at higher rates, and far too often the approach to discipline they encounter is based on a model of punishment grounded in a sometimes openly articulated belief that many boys of color can be identified from the earliest of ages as "bound for jail." Ann Arnett Ferguson chillingly describes "a disturbing pattern of African-American male footsteps out of classrooms, down hallways, and into disciplinary spaces throughout the school day" (Ferguson 2001). She goes on to argue that this pattern has devastating consequences for how these "bad boys" come to construct their racial identities and the range of their life prospects.

Key Implications for Practice:

- "One-size-fits-all" programs must be replaced with multi-source, multi-level curricula, and teachers who know how to use and support the diversity in their classrooms to improve teaching and learning for everyone.

- Tackle head-on the negative effects of unconscious bias in how males of color are taught and disciplined through a systematic review of all operating systems, especially those that sort, track, punish, or reward students.

- Center behavior management approaches on connecting males of color to the learning environment. Center discipline policies on restoring that connectedness when it is broken. Do not further disrupt the connection through policies of humiliation, recrimination, and exclusion.

- Create comprehensive systems in which multiple sources of data are used and shared, making it possible for schools to intervene early and effectively when challenges arise.

- Provide personalized learning environments with mentors, counseling, and other supports from the neighborhoods and communities in which students live.

TOUCHSTONE #3: SCHOOL IS OFTEN AN INHOSPITABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR MANY MALE STUDENTS, INCLUDING MALES OF COLOR.

The Problem:

Boys of all races and ethnic groups increasingly find school an inhospitable environment and school success elusive. Don Clossun (2010) summarizes this trend:

"Recent statistics reveal that from elementary school and beyond, girls get better grades than boys and generally fare better in school. Although girls have all but eliminated the math and science gap with boys, boys' scores in reading and writing have been on the decline for years. At the end of eighth grade, boys are held back 50 percent more often, and girls are twice as likely to say that they want to pursue a professional career. Boys are twice as likely to be labeled as 'learning disabled' and, in many schools, are 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with learning disabilities such as ADD. Boys now make up two-thirds of our special education classes and account for 71 percent of all suspensions. There is also evidence that boys suffer from low self-esteem and lack of confidence as learners." Black and Latino boys often bring to their schooling experience an energy that does not fit with a traditional . . . approach to education in which teachers put students in rows and demand that they remain silent, and where compliance, rather than evidence of learning, constitutes the measure of school success.

Key Implications for Practice:

- Increase the capacity of teachers to deliver differentiated pedagogical practices that meet the needs of all students and offer opportunities for engagement for children of both genders from various backgrounds. These practices include active learning strategies that channel and make positive use of the diverse levels of physical and emotional energy that children bring with them to school. They also include cooperative learning strategies that capitalize on the strengths of all learners.

- Increase the capacity of teachers to pay careful attention to student engagement throughout the school day, to create structures that reflect changing levels of energy and engagement throughout the day, and to take the time to engage students in critical conversations and thought exercises.

- Ensure that every student has at least one adult in his life who takes an active interest in that student's academic success. Ideally, that is a parent or other family member. For any student for whom that is not the case, find that student a surrogate coach immediately (Hupfeld 2007).

- Provide students with opportunities: to become increasingly engaged in, and responsible for, their own learning through higher levels of choice about what they read; to discuss what they read with their peers, to write about what they read, and to discuss what they have written with their peers; and to come to understand the assessment of their work and engage in conversation about what they need in order to make progress (and in the process, to become more responsible for and connected to their academic performance).

- Engage boys and young men of color themselves in the discourse about "what works"— not only those who have been successful in school, but, as Dr. Jewell-Sherman reminds us, those who have not. So many of our brightest young leaders have detoured into the juvenile justice system; the most fortunate among them make it back. Their examples and testimonies are critical elements to this discourse and in ongoing professional development for educators.

TOUCHSTONE #4: MULTI-GENERATIONAL, HYPER-SEGREGATED POVERTY BRINGS ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES FOR MANY BLACK AND LATINO MALES.

The Problem:

Owing to the historical intersection of class and race in the United States, a large number of black and Latino boys live in racially, economically, and culturally segregated neighborhoods. Immigration and/or first-language issues add another layer of challenge for many Latino boys. As a result, many of our boys and young men of color do not grow up in environments in which the cultural and behavioral norms of home, neighborhood, and school are seamlessly integrated and reinforcing. Indeed, many of them experience cognitive and emotional dissonance every day as they travel from the world of the home, to the world of the streets, to the world of school. As long as schools rely on deficit-driven models in which students' homes and neighborhoods are seen as mere obstacles, not as potential assets, boys of color will more often than not see school as a choice between "the teacher and mama" (Delpit 2006). School success will often mean that students learn how to "code switch" as they move across their many environments. They won't do it unless they assent to doing it (Kohl, 1992); they can't do it unless they are taught how to do it (Delpit 2006). Many teachers are currently unprepared and/or unwilling to accept responsibility for this piece of schooling.

The majority of academically successful students, most of them from homes in which at least one parent is a college graduate and in which successful academic routines are as pervasive as the air they breathe, read on their own, both for their own reasons and because their parents do. Before they ever start Kindergarten, they have been read to for an average of 2,000 hours. When they are 17 years old and arrive for the SAT test, they bring the fluency, stamina, and

everyday habit of reading complex, grade-level text in a wide variety of genres. They have academic vocabularies of at least 15,000 words not in the everyday speech of most college-educated adults.

This independent reading habit accounts for a large part of the achievement gap faced by males of color, especially those living in poverty, who for a variety of historical and cultural reasons do not develop this life habit. Instead, many arrive at school lacking academic role models, are unfamiliar with academic home routines, experience a vocabulary gap that grows exponentially with each successive year of schooling, and have led a comparatively print-free life. Schools must address this. As Mike Schmoker says, "If you're born poor, you'd better be reading" (2011).

Key Implications for Practice:

- Establish a reading culture in which every student is expected to be an avid reader—to read for their own purposes, from books they can read and want to read, for at least an hour every day.

- Determine the highest reading level at which each student is currently able to read and understand text. Share the results with the student.

- Require every student to document 30 minutes of reading practice every day in school from books they can read and choose to read.

- Require every student to document 30 minutes of reading practice at home and, if this is not completed, ensure this home reading time is completed in school.

- Require teachers and principals to put in place whatever organizational supports are required to ensure that 100 percent of their students document this amount of reading practice. This includes those who hate to read, who can't read, who miss many days of school, whose first language isn't English, who are often on suspension, who won't cooperate, and whose parents won't help them. This includes everyone.

- Understand that, in order to meet this challenge, classrooms and schools must reorganize many of their systems and rethink many of their assumptions. As they learn to do this, they will do much of what needs to be done in order to succeed with all students, especially black and Latino boys and young men.

TOUCHSTONE #5: THE CURRICULUM AND THE INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES THAT DELIVER IT OFTEN FAIL TO ENGAGE MALES OF COLOR.

The Problem:

Instructional programs working specifically with boys and men of color must provide opportunities for students to engage and connect to the curriculum. The curriculum must serve

as a mirror in which the personal, cultural, and historical experiences and assets of boys and young men of color are reflected and built upon. Equally important, schools must create windows—opportunities for students, particularly males of color, to expand their experiences with the broader human family and to widen their potential horizons. As Noguera (2012) asserts, "It's hard to aspire to something you have never seen." This imperative requires educators to think broadly about the kinds of actual and vicarious learning experiences and opportunities we need to include in our formal and hidden curricula.

Key Implications for Practice:

- Ensure that the curricula and materials in every subject area reflect the multicultural nature of our shared history, science, and arts.

- Deliver instructional practices that cultivate agency, not mere compliance. Students (and teachers) must learn to take responsibility for their own learning, their own success, and their own lives.

- Students must learn to be creative and critical thinkers, using a problem-solving approach to learning, rather than mindlessly applying rules and algorithms that don't make sense to them.

- Embedded in every lesson must be the notion that students are entitled to expect their work to make sense and to matter to them personally.

- The curriculum should formally teach the skills necessary for all students, particularly males of color, to navigate the "worlds" in which they live and travel. Teachers, coaches, and mentors should be forthright in acknowledging the complexities and challenges inherent in doing so successfully.

- Connect instruction to the world of work through the intentional use of projects and through integrating specific workplace-skills development into the curriculum.

- Ground curriculum and instructional practice in the principle that "Smart is not something you are. Smart is something you become." Learn about growth mindset and work with youth to cultivate a growth mindset. There is research now that shows how a growth mindset can have a positive effect on combating stereotype threat (Aronson, Fried, & Good 2002; Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht 2003). Increase the capacity of teachers to deliver differentiated pedagogical practices that meet the needs of all students and offer opportunities for engagement for students of both genders from various backgrounds. These practices include active learning strategies and cooperative learning strategies that capitalize on the strengths of all learners.

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