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**National Cry for Help: Psychological issues as
they relate to Education; A Realistic Approach to
Understanding and Coping with the African
American Males**

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ABSTRACT

One could argue that advance teacher training does not make a difference in student achievement. According to William Sanders, Professor of the University of Tennessee argues, that the single most dominant factor affecting student achievement gain is teachers advance training. African American students make up 17 percent of the public school population nationwide. Only six percent of the teachers nationally are African American. Nationally there are schools with no African American male representation as an academic teacher. Consequently, they are employed as custodians, security guards, and P.E. teachers. In retrospect, schools hire African American males as an assistant principal which is transparent for a keeper of being in charge of the African American male behavior problems. Coincidentally, African American males benefited from Jim Crow laws, because many intelligent African Americans were denied corporate America, they were forced into education and ministry. In the present, many African American now choose corporate American over the education of the Black community.

Introduction

Oftentimes, in public education African American males are handled in a manner that is not suitable for their character, home environment, learning style or the African/Black culture. Many times these young men are being broken down mentally, by teachers who are not prepared and lack the capabilities, knowledge base and common judgment in order to provide these lost souls a quality education. We as educators are in a state of emergency, when it comes to African American male students. Due to societal pressures, it is quite evident that we are losing these indigent young men to the penal systems. According to Kaplan, H.R., Johnson, Bailey, and Simon (1987), their incarceration, conviction and arrest rates have been at the top of the charts in most states for some time, Roper (1991), stated that even as babies, Black males have the highest probability of dying in the first year of life Auerbach, Krimgold, and Lefkowitz (2000), adds, as they grow older they face the unfortunate reality of being the only group in the United States experiencing a decline in life expectancy (Spivak, Prothrow-Stith, & Hausman,1988). In the occupational market Black males are the least likely to be hired, and in many cities, the most likely to be unemployed (Wilson, 1987).

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to obtain a comprehensive comprehension of the psychological issues that stimulate these negative societal pressures and how it affect the African American male, how these issues can be alleviated, psychological issues and how it affect the mental capacity of the African American male and recommendations for future solutions for aiding educators in coping and adapting to the African American male.

Mental Breakdown

It is assumed that the future of Black males lies within the hands of White female teachers, who constitute more than 83 percent of the elementary teaching force. Since the landmark case of *Brown vs. Topeka*, school integration decision of 1954, the declination of African American teachers is at an alarming 66 percent. The African American male teacher has almost become non-existent.

Stereotypes of Black Males

The discrepancies for black students fall primarily in the high incidence categories (e.g., mild mental retardation or serious emotional disturbance), those based on school identification rather than some organicity, e.g., visual or hearing impairment (NRC, 2002). Data illustrates that African American students are 2.9 times as likely to be labeled mentally retarded, 1.9 times as likely to be labeled seriously emotionally disturbed, and 1.3 times as likely to be labeled as having a learning disability. Black students make up over one-third of all students identified as mentally retarded and one-fourth of those labeled emotionally disturbed. Even more disconcerting are data from states such as Virginia where blacks were reported as 20 percent of the population but constitute over half of the students in programs for the mildly retarded or a state such as Alabama that certifies four times as many minorities as emotionally mentally retarded than whites (Ladner & Hammons, 2001).

Males in general tend to be disproportionately identified for special education, particularly for the categories of behavior disorders and mental retardation (U.S. Department of Education, 1999), and placed in programs for serious emotional disturbances at a rate that is three and one half times that for females (Kehrberg, 1994). When male status and culturally linguistic diverse membership (i.e., African American) are combined, however, special education status and other undesired outcomes are even more predictive. Black males, compared to white males regardless of socioeconomic level, are much more likely to be suspended at a younger age, receive lengthier suspensions, be tracked in low-ability classes, be retained in their grade levels, placed in special education classes, programmed into punishment facilities such as juvenile court rather than to treatment, and given more pathological labels than warranted (Carmen, 1990; Coutinho, Oswald, & Forness, 2002; Ewing, 1995; Forness, 1988; Irvine, 1990; McFadden, Marsh, Price, & Hwang, 1992; Meisels & Law, 1993; Oakes, 1994). Empirical investigations have designated the African American male as the most failure prone segment within America's schools ("Paper links Blacks failure," 1996; Townsend, Smith, & Lee, 1995). Social factors such as inadequate models, patterns of violence, parenting styles, and racial victimization are cited as major contributors to this phenomenon; however, critical attention must be paid, as well, to the educational programming of these students, and proper training must be warranted for teachers when there is no cultural connection between the student and the teacher.

Behavior and Discipline

Socially conscious authorities increasingly assert that U.S. schools are failing their students and at an even higher rate disproportionately fail indigent students of color (Bettmann & Moore, 1994; Kozol, 1991; Gomez, 1994). A pronounced example of the school's failure lies within its disciplinary measures asserted towards African American male students. The over zealous emphasis on punishment and coercive practices can be ineffectively leading towards negative modeling as well as causing students to devalue their education, their school, the schooling process, and school personnel. This greater push toward suspensions and expulsions appears to be counterproductive and contraindicated, benefiting neither the schools nor the students it purports to serve, and often exacerbating learning and behavior problems (Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Morgan-D'Atrio, Northup, LaFleur, & Spera, 1996). Suspensions and punitive practices start very early in an African American child's schooling. Disciplinary rates for blacks are consistently higher in suburban areas than in urban districts. That is, as the white membership of the school district increased the chances of a black student being subjected to disciplinary actions correspondingly increased. This observation parallels the research findings on special education referrals for minority students. Considering that disciplinary actions are often a trigger for special education referral, the data pattern is not surprising. Lo and Cartledge (2001), illustrate, considered the office disciplinary referral data for two elementary urban schools and discovered that out-of-school suspensions in the predominantly black school greatly exceeded those for the predominately white school during the same eight-month school period.

Kozol (1995) reported data on a 6-year follow-up of one 9th-grade class for a New York City high school serving poor and minority students, 87 percent of those students were discharged, the term used for officially removing students from school. Education in general and specialized instruction, in particular, was initiated to help children steadily improve and foster growth. When academic performance and disciplinary actions are descending at an increasing high rate, one should reevaluate the obvious. What is being done to provide, produce, African American male students with a quality education and the ability to become a productive, cultivated scholar and pillar in society?

Low Expectations

Low expectations are a major factor that severely plagues culturally linguistic diverse children, especially African American males. If teachers and others make assumptions that a student is performing according to his ability, and no additional efforts are being made to try to foster student to performance on grade level, the student is deemed to fail. What African American students need is more, not less instruction. If there is any hope that African American students will overcome any labels that are associated with behavior problems, it is up to multicultural produced educators to ensure that they are academically competent.

The profile presented is one that is too common for African American males. Some authorities argue that the emotional consequences of failure impact African

American males more severely than females, and in the face of harsher economic and social realities, confront their families with the added challenge of socializing boys in ways that reduce vulnerabilities to school failure and various forms of self-destructive behavior. From infancy into adulthood, males are socialized to be aggressive, dominant, competitive, and assertive. In the classroom, where the teacher is likely to be a female from a different race or a different culture, these behaviors may be viewed as threatening if not pathological.

Instructional issues

Too often these children are indigent, entering the schooling process with approximately one-half of the language and academic readiness of their more affluent peers (Hart & Risley, 1995). Impoverished culturally linguistic diverse children are unlikely to receive early learning experiences needed to be successful in school. The lack of readiness sets the tone for a trajectory of increasingly greater failure. After a period of sufficient failure, the schools initiate the process of labeling and special education placement. The special education label suggests some disorder within the child and the need for more resources. However, culturally linguistic diverse children are routed towards special education, because it has become a place to put students when they do not perform (Meyer & Patton, 2002). Instead of being sources for habilitation, special education for black students is often marked by low-level instruction, restrictive placements, and limited opportunities for return to mainstream educational settings. The curriculum in many of these classes, especially in programs for children with behavior disorders is one of “control” so that the classes essentially become holding stations until students eventually drop out or are pushed out of school. Students in programs for special education have the highest drop out rates and poorest outcomes of all the students in our schools (Guetzloe, 1996).

The importance of challenging curricula, effective teaching, and robust learning cannot be over emphasized for Black students. African American males identified with behavior problems fully integrated into general education classes where scripted, high paced, dynamic lessons were being conducted by teachers trained in direct instruction procedures (e.g., Englemann, Becker, Carnine, & Gersten, 1988). These lessons are characterized by high rates of oral and written student responses, are tightly structured that students are constantly engaged in academic responding with limited opportunities to act otherwise. Structured conditions reduce the opportunities for students to disrupt and undermine the learning of fellow classmates. In the general education, direct instruction classrooms, typical to an uninformed observer could not easily pick a labeled student.

Teacher issues

Teacher beliefs are extremely important; their beliefs influence their expectations and judgments about students' abilities, effort, and progress in school (Obiakor, 1999). Biased beliefs can color the way children's behaviors are perceived, causing some actions to be misperceived and inappropriately handled (Obiakor, 2001; Obiakor, Algozzine, Thurlow, Gwalla-Ogisi, Enwefe, Enwefe, & McIntosh, 2002). Educators have questioned the cultural competence of both general and special educators (e.g., Dandy, 1990; Ford, 1992; Pang & Sablan, 1998), for example, White teachers had possessed negative attitudes and beliefs about African American children than African American teachers (Irvine, 1990) or “teachers believe African American students have little potential and expect less performance from them” (Pang & Sablan, 1998, p. 508). These observations

are supported by the empirical literature that white teachers, compared to black teachers were more likely to refer black children to special education (Ladner & Hammons, 2001) and as school districts became increasingly whiter there were corresponding increases in the percentage of culturally linguistic diverse students, particularly black students, enrolled in special education (Coutinho, Oswald, & Forness, 2002; Ladner & Hammons, 2001). The latter finding led Coutinho, et al. to conclude, “that students who ‘stand out’ by virtue of being a member of a small ethnic minority may be more likely to be identified as having ED, a result based on difference rather than on disability” (p. 121). Teacher skill is an extremely important factor relative to overrepresentation. Novice teachers appeared to be no more prepared for student diversity than their predecessors (Pohan, 1996). Children in diverse classrooms are more likely to be taught by inexperienced novice teachers until after a survival period when the teachers are given a rewarding classroom. The quality and quantity of instruction provided to African American students from diverse backgrounds often are inferior to instruction than instruction offered by to their more affluent peers (Greenwood, Delquadri, & Hall, 1989; Hart & Risley, 1995). African American students need to be taught more, not less (Delpit, 1995), their instruction needs to be explicit (Delpit, 1995; Hirsch, 1999) and it needs to be active, giving African American students many opportunities to respond (Arreaga-Mayer & Greenwood, 1986; Heward, 2000). Another important issue is the cultural competence of the teacher. Teachers whose culture or classes differ from that of their students are likely to misinterpret the students’ behaviors, often attributing to the student more pathology or punishing consequences than warranted. There is a strong need for cross-cultural training, especially for white female teachers who are likely to overreact to the externalizing behaviors of boys and inadvertently empowering these youngsters in the very behaviors they wish to extinguish.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, our schools have adopted the philosophy of zero tolerance. Rules have been initiated and common sense has been abandoned. Under the umbrella of these rules, students have been suspended and or expelled for superfluous things that could have easily been taken care of in a logical fashion, Bell (2002), indicates that the educational system is one avenue to achieve equality, parity and justice. Alienation is the antithesis to achieving a true democracy. Our heritage deems that we cannot criminalize a segment of our community while we profess to fully and competently educate another (Bell, 2002). Bell (2002) stated that every inhabitant of our community must have access to the wealth of society as well as to the justice of the society in order for African American males to become productive members of a multicultural, multiracial country.

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