African-Canadian Educators' Perspectives:
Critical Factors for Success

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Author's Note

Abstract

This study investigates the perspectives of African-Canadian educators on critical factors for success in their educational careers. Interviews were conducted and life histories were constructed to analyze the complex and multifaceted nature of the experiences of ten African-Canadian educators. These data indicate that family and community support, rigorous academic qualifications, role modeling, and the establishment of strong interpersonal relationships have been significant influences on the participants' success. The author suggests that an improved understanding about African-Canadian educators' lived experiences hold implications for all educators in their teaching approaches and for student learning.

Keywords : African Canadian, educators, success, role modeling, self-determination

Résumé

Cette étude examine les perspectives d'éducateurs afro-canadiens sur les facteurs déterminants en termes de réussite dans leur parcours pédagogique. Des entrevues ont été menées et des récits de vie ont été constitués pour analyser la nature complexe et variée de l'expérience de dix éducateurs afro-canadiens. Ces données indiquent que le soutien des familles et de la communauté, de solides qualifications académiques, la modélisation de rôle, et l'établissement de fortes relations interpersonnelles ont eu une influence significative sur la réussite des participants. L'auteur suggère qu'une meilleure compréhension des expériences vécues par ces éducateurs afro-canadiens aurait des

répercussions et des implications pour tous les éducateurs dans leurs démarches d'enseignement et pour l'apprentissage des élèves.

Mots clés: afro-canadien, éducateurs, réussite, modélisation de rôle, auto-détermination

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Recruiting and retaining educators of African heritage is an ongoing issue in school boards across Canada and in the United States. Finding out what attracts teachers of African heritage to the profession and what factors they see as critical to their success is an important step towards understanding how school boards can encourage and support them in their work. This study investigates the perspectives of African-Canadian educators on critical factors for success in their educational careers.

This study was carried out by interviewing 10 African-Canadian educators in Nova Scotia. Specifically, the purpose of this study was twofold**.** The first objective was to describe the background and demographic characteristics, early life histories and education, and socio-cultural experiences of 10 African-Canadian educators in Nova Scotia. The second objective was to examine what they perceive have been critical factors for their success. Interviews were conducted and life histories were analyzed to describe the complex and multifaceted nature of the experiences of these African-Canadian educators. The voices of these educators provide insights into the critical factors for their success.

Literature Review

There is a lack of research literature on the educational backgrounds and experiences of African-American[1] educators and their reasons for choosing teaching as a career. However, important discussions (Delpit, 1995; Foster, 1994; Irvine, 1990; King, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1994) suggest that African-American educators can provide insight in addressing the challenges that students of African heritage face. In addition, the presence of African-American teachers is especially crucial in schools where a large percentage of students come from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 1990; Haberman, 1996; Zeichner, 1993). A close examination of the importance of African-American teachers (King, 1993) indicates that African-American teachers often bring to the classroom experiences, expectations, and teaching methodologies that support and enhance the school achievement of African-American children. Moreover, African-American teachers may serve as role models for students of all backgrounds (Graham, 1987). In this way, understanding what draws African-American educators into the profession and what factors contribute to their success can be an important step towards supporting not just educators of African heritage, but also students of African heritage.

Furthermore, the life histories[2] of teachers represent an exciting, emergent literature in educational research (Casey, 1993; Foster, 1993; Goodson, 1992) and yet there are few studies that document the life histories of educators of African heritage or African-Canadian educators. I agree with the research that a teacher's background and experiences influence the expectations she/he holds for students who are culturally diverse (Irvine, 1990) and the perceptions of and motives for teaching (Gordon, 1993; hooks, 1989; King, 1993; Shaw, 1996; Su, 1997). For African-American teachers, orientations to work, sense of family, and a sense of community responsibility are powerful determinants of their decisions to teach (Collins, 1991; Fultz,1995; Neverdon-Morton, 1989; Surdarkasa, 1981). I want to contribute to this emergent literature of

narrative research by examining the educational and life history of 10 Canadian educators of African heritage. I want to know what critical factors have contributed to their success. What can we learn about their socialization to inform the teaching and learning process, as well as the recruitment and retention of more educators of African heritage?

Research Design and Goals

An important feature of this study was the use of the life history method and the choice of participants. The life history method provided a structure to obtain background information, with the flexibility of conversational questions during the interviews. The choice of participants was important in that they represent all levels of education.

Life History and Analysis

As noted by Atkinson and Hammersley (1979), life history is a research method employed by ethnographers because life histories offer a unique way of gathering information about the experiences of specific groups and individuals. Life history interviews elicit structured autobiographies or detailed studies of the lives of individuals. Seidmann (1991) has used an interview process to explore the experiences of the participants, their educational experience and their interactions with members of the communities. This approach allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions to build upon and explore the participants' responses to these questions. The goal is to have the participant recount her/his experiences within the topic under study. For instance, I began by asking the participants to describe their family upbringing, their community, their academic background, and highlights of their teaching experiences. These questions have guided the data collection and analysis:

1) Describe your background, and explain what you think in your background has prepared you to be a successful educator?
2) Discuss what do you consider have been critical factors for your success?

After each interview was completed, participants were given the opportunity to contact me to respond further to any topic that had been raised. The data collected resulted in personal and demographic characteristics presented below, and recurrent themes that describe the participants' experiences, and their perceptions of factors that have directly impacted on their lives.

Participants

Interviews were conducted with 10 educators of African heritage within the educational school system of Nova Scotia. All indicated a willingness to participate in life history interviews. I have selected these individuals as a result of the leadership positions they have held at various levels in public education: schools, school boards, and department of education. These individuals represented (a) diverse religious/faith orientations; (b) diverse communities; (c) families of varying socioeconomic levels and levels of educational attainment; (d) attendance in predominantly minority or majority schools with teachers from diverse races, cultures, and backgrounds; and (e) educational careers at all levels of public education. To protect the participants' identities, their

names have been changed, as have any references to individuals mentioned within the interview process.

Participant Characteristics

In this section, I present brief descriptions of each participant. These descriptions demonstrate the strong academic qualifications, leadership roles that the participants played, and what they saw as their particular focus as teachers.

Denise (BA, MEd, DEA) is an African-Canadian, who grew up in Barbados. She has taught in schools at many levels for 21 years, and has been principal of a First Nations school. Denise has always had a desire to teach.

Judith (BA, BEd, MA, MEd) is an African-Canadian, born in Nova Scotia. She has taught in high schools for 11 years, and served as Race Relations and Cross Cultural Understanding (RCH)[3] coordinator for school board, as well as acting director of the African Canadian Services Division (ACSD)[4] for the Department of Education of Nova Scotia. Her focus is to address social justice issues.

Andrew (BA, BEd, PhD) is an African-Canadian, originally from Uganda. He was selected by his family to pursue university studies, and won the Commonwealth scholarship for Dalhousie in 1985. He has been director of ACSD, and leader in the implementation of the Black Learners Advisory Committee (BLAC)[5] report. Andrew is a devoted advocate for encouraging students to have strong academic qualifications.

David (BEd, MEd) is an African-Canadian, born in Nova Scotia. David has been supported by his family and community, who place a number of expectations on him. He has worked as a teacher, principal, RCH coordinator, consultant, and acting director for ACSD. He often serves as mediator between the African Nova Scotian community and the education system.

Lori (BA) is an African-Canadian, born in Nova Scotia. She has served as Coordinator of Scholarships and administration for ACSD. Lori's openness and welcoming approach has provided a crucial role in supporting students, who at times may not have continued and may have chosen to leave their academic studies.

Naomi (BA, BEd, MEd) is an African Canadian, born in Nova Scotia. She has been a teacher, principal of a Community College, and consultant and leader in professional development. She has been directly responsible for establishing and implementing policies to support anti-racism education. She is very committed to addressing social justice issues.

Melissa (BA, BEd, MEd) is an African-Canadian, born in Nova Scotia. As a single mother, Melissa had to work at several different jobs to survive. She has been a teacher, RCH coordinator, leader in professional development, and has administered the 4plus program for African Nova Scotian students. Having a strong Christian faith, Melissa spoke proudly of her Baptist church and the emotional support and encouragement which the people of her community have given her throughout her life.

Serena (BA, BEd, MEd) is a African-Canadian, born in Nova Scotia, who spoke proudly of her roots. She has been a teacher, an RCH coordinator, a leader in professional development. In this role as RCH coordinator, she advises individuals in the area of program development to incorporate areas of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc. into the existing curriculum. Serena believes in treating everyone with respect and

dignity.

Ruth (BA, BEd) is an African-Canadian, born in Nova Scotia. She says, "I am a teacher because I had people in my life who encouraged me, both in public school and at home to succeed, to live up to my potential." She has taught for many years. In her classes, she incorporates literature of African heritage. Ruth has taken a leadership role in the lead team to develop and implement the curriculum for English 12: African Heritage and African Canadian Studies 11. Ruth insists on students' reaching their potential, in order to have the skills they need to pursue their studies and their dreams.

Sebastian (BA, BEd,MA) is an African-Canadian who came to Canada from Zaire in 1981. He has taught for many years in schools, and at the Nova Scotia Teacher's College. His rule of life is to accept himself and to accept others for whom they are. He is always open to suggestions to improve his teaching skills. Sebastian is committed to his students and insists on helping his students maximize their language skills in French. Many of his students go on to pursue academic studies in French at university.

Research Findings

Based on an analysis of the life histories, several themes emerged to indicate that the participants' family and community experiences have influenced their perceptions of who they are. The participants provided stories about their educational experiences to demonstrate how these have been critical factors for their success.

Support From Family

One factor that surfaced immediately during analysis was the importance of support from family and extended family. Judith stated:

> *My family was always there to support me, in part my mother and father. If ever there was an issue of racism, my parents were first to be at school, to see what happened and to have the issue addressed. My sister was a ' trailblazer,' because I'm not sure I would have done some of the things if she had not gone before me.*

Andrew spoke of how his family has played such a crucial role in his life and education in Uganda. He stated:

> *I was identified early on by my teachers that I had great potential. It was my maternal and paternal grandmothers who provided a home for me for my earlier education. When I was ready for what is junior high here in Canada, my maternal uncle would go to the school to speak on behalf of my parents, who had little education. When it was time for me to go on, the school authorities advised my maternal uncle to tell my parents to sell what they had to get the money to send me to university.*

As a result he completed high school, then went to study at Makerere University in Kampala, and then earned a five-year Canadian commonwealth scholarship to complete his doctoral studies at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Denise spoke about her parents, but especially the support provided by her

mother. She said:

> *I was the only one in my family that wanted to further my education. I always wanted to from the time I was a child. I loved books and learning. My mother saw that in me, and encouraged me. We didn't have the money for me to go away, but my mother gave me the place to stay at home and travel daily to classes.*

Lori was encouraged to go to university by parents and other family members, who had not gone to university. In her work, Lori advised students about scholarship applications. Lori explained:

> *When I am speaking to students who are going to pursue post-secondary education, I'm thinking, if I'm going to be advising somebody then it would be important for me to have attended school at the university level.*

Support from family has always been present in Sebastian's life from his father and uncles, who were teachers. When Sebastian wanted to come to Canada, his sister who was here, helped him in the process of immigrating. Sebastian is very appreciative of all the support that he has received from his family.

Support from Community
Many participants spoke of the support that they have received from their community. In some cases, they have gone into detail to demonstrate how this support has played out in their lives. Judith received a lot of encouragement from the women in her church community. She explained:

> *Whether it be rhythm band, junior choir practice, Sunday school, Canadian Girls in Training (CGIT), everywhere when they met me they started by asking, "How did you do in school this week? How did you prepare for your tests?", they were pushing education, because a lot of them did not have a high school education themselves, and had to do service work in the community, cleaning houses for mainstream society.*

Serena talked of the support that she has received from the African-Canadian community in her work. Sometimes she has to make decisions that the community does not always understand. Serena explained:

> *Sometimes it's very difficult, because although I am of African descent, I still have to prove to the community a sense of trust and make them understand that there are rules and policies, which I need to follow. Yet, I feel that the Black community provides me with support.*

Support from community, friends, and family who are part of the community have played a major role in David's life. He explained: "Being grounded in my community, there was a sense of expectation that I would do something to improve my community, and education seemed to be the way to go." David talked about another individual who

had gone on and completed her university. He said, "If she can do it, so can I." And he did. He graduated from university, became a teacher, a principal, a coordinator, and an assistant director.

Support from Teachers and Colleagues in Schools

Denise indicated that at times she felt very isolated working in schools, often being the only teacher of African heritage. One major support for her was a teacher colleague who worked next door to her. At the time, Denise lived alone, her husband worked in another province, and she had an 18-month-old daughter; she had no family in Canada, so she was very much alone. Denise was teaching Grade 8 social studies at this time. Sometimes she would go to work tired, after being up at night with her daughter, or preparing schoolwork. Denise explained:

> *This colleague, a good friend, worked next door to me. She would say that she had an open door. She told me, "Denise, if I'm in the middle of anything and you need help, just knock on the door and come in." This was a huge security for me. It helped a lot. Now, I've known people that have been in situations where they felt isolated. I didn't feel as isolated as some other people whom I had talked to who were in a similar situation, being the only Black teacher in a school.*

Judith spoke of the support that she received from her teachers in school. They encouraged her to develop her potential. She said:

> *These were White teachers who made me feel good about myself. They weren't judgmental about me, they accepted me from where I came, for whom I was, they were very supportive, and encouraged anything that I wanted to do.*

Good working relations with one's colleagues is very important to Sebastian. Although Sebastian works in a difficult school, which has had a lot of racial conflict in the past, Sebastian explained how his colleagues have provided the support needed to be successful. He said:

> *I don't remember ever having a verbal conflict with any teacher here, ever. I have great respect for them, and they show great respect to me. This really encourages me, it's an important factor for success.*

Financial Support

Denise indicated that she has been lucky. She had graduated from university without having big loans, because of her support from her parents. If she had not had that support, she would have still gone into teaching. Denise explained:

> *You could start teaching in primary school in Barbados, with a number of certificates, and then do an in-service teaching degree. While you are teaching, you're working, earning some money, you could also be doing some teacher training, but because I had support from home, I chose to finish a lot of my studies.*

Andrew emphasized that if he had not received financial aid from his family, extended family, and educational institutions, completion of his university studies would not have been possible. Later in life, Andrew was able to assist other students through his position as Director of African Canadian Services Division. An important part of his job was to promote and obtain financial support for students, and to manage scholarship funds to support them in their academic studies.

Lori, a Scholarship Coordinator, spoke of her role in the process and the positive effects of the Scholarship program. Students, parents, and sometimes guidance counselors often call for advice, wanting to know what makes them eligible, what courses they need, what they need to do to receive and keep the scholarship, etc. Lori talked about an email that she received from a recipient. She said:

> *This was a person who had received a scholarship years before. He now had a Ph. D., was living out west and wanted to thank the African-Canadian Services Division for the funding he had received. He said, "it was because of the scholarship that he had received early in his studies that had been able to achieve this level of academic success."*

This was a highlight for Lori, to hear from him that financial assistance did make a difference.

'Someone Believed in Me and My Self-determination'

Another important factor identified by all respondents was the knowledge that one or more individuals believed in them and expected them to succeed. According to Serena, members of her community used to tell her how good she was with children and that she should be a teacher. "It was as if that was expected of me, and I couldn't let them down." Serena also spoke of her parents' belief in her abilities:

> *When there were many obstacles and I felt like giving up, my mother used to say, "Don't ever give up. You have what God provides for you and nobody will stop you from what he wants you to do." One supervisor saw things in me that I may not have seen in myself. He would select me to serve on committees, when I knew no one. I would wonder why he had chosen me. He would say, "I know you have the potential." He was preparing me for the work which I do today in race relations, mediation, and leadership training for teachers.*

David explained that when he graduated, he was told by his family and community, "We knew you could do it." Another person who believed in him and taught him how to succeed was his principal, his mentor; he provided him with tips on how to be successful as a teacher with his students.

Ruth explained how she had many members of the African-Canadian community who supported her, especially from the Church community: the minister, his wife. Having lived most of her life in the White community, she added that she had employers from mainstream society and the neighbors next door who really believed in her and encouraged her. In Ruth's case, she clearly stated, "I had the determination and the self-

confidence to succeed." Ruth explained how this had been developed:

> *When she was a teenager she went for a summer job. She was afraid to go alone and wanted her friends to go with her. However, her mother insisted that she must go alone. When she was being interviewed, the person interviewing told her, "You have to sell yourself; you have to tell me why I should hire you."*

She got the job. It was from this point in her life that she acknowledged that she developed a way of putting across her ideas so that people would listen to her.

Rigourous Academic Qualifications and Training

Andrew emphasized the importance of having a global education and strong academic qualifications. When opportunities arise, having the academic qualifications is crucial. He said, "The career I have had is directly linked to my academic qualifications. Without them it is impossible to even compete."

Andrew talked about the education received by students in public schools in Nova Scotia; that is, an Anglo-Canadian education. There was never any mention of African heritage in the classroom, in the programs, in the curriculum, or in the textbooks. Students learned of one culture and had nothing to compare this to. Diversity in the knowledge-base regarding race did not occur. The students never saw or heard of any individuals of African descent in their studies. As a result, all of these participants had to learn about their African heritage from their communities, through their own research, and by personal study.

All respondents emphasized the importance of having completed a university education. Time and time again, the participants who had gone through the Nova Scotia school system mentioned how frequently they had been advised by guidance counselors that when they finished high school, they should either go to work or take a trade. However, encouragement received from parents, community members, and from some teachers gave them the incentive to pursue academic studies. All of them indicated how education had opened doors and provided opportunities that they would not have had otherwise.

Sebastian spoke of the importance of coming to Canada well-prepared academically. Knowing and understanding the Canadian culture was the first step. Next, it was very important to have a solid academic foundation so that he could work in such a way to contribute to Canadian society, contribute to its development economically and culturally. He explained, "As a minority, it is important to be accepted and to be listened to. Education gives us the confidence and means to communicate our ideas effectively and to contribute solutions to problems."

Professional development was an important aspect of these participants' careers. Serena described the professional development and training that she received: a focus on leadership skills, facilitation and mediation processes, and race relations training. This training has been crucial in the work that she does as Race Relations and Cross Cultural Understanding coordinator. She explained, "All of these sessions have helped me in the work that I do, working with people with different personalities, different learning styles, different communication styles, in different dynamics."

Role Models

Role models are very important in every person's life. Andrew spoke of his uncles who were strong role models for him. They had completed university educations, had good jobs, nice houses, were very vocal in giving him advice, and in supporting his education. Andrew explained:

People aspire to a role or profession where they see somebody they admire. To aspire to be in that position, you have to know that it is possible and to know this, you have to see somebody that looks like you in that role. I wanted to be a teacher because my uncle was a teacher. If Black students don't know anybody in a particular role that they admire, then they are not going to aspire to that particular role. You have to see someone in that role to imagine yourself in that role.

Andrew spoke of the shock of finding out, in the early 1990's, that there were so few Black teachers in Nova Schools; there were also few Black policemen, firemen, judges, and so on. He said:

Role modeling is really critical. When I first realized this at the ACSD, I began the process of addressing this issue by having Black support workers placed in every school to support Black students. I also know the importance of having curriculum that reflects Black people. I had always used books with Black people in my early education. But here, in Nova Scotia there were no Black faces. There were no books, no murals of Black people in schools or in any public buildings, no Black teachers. I became more conscious about who is reflected in an environment.

Role models have played a major part in Melissa's life. These were older women in the community who Melissa aspired to be like. Melissa explained:

I was drawn to the wisdom and the security and the motherly way about them where people might look at them and say, "Yes, they're homemakers." But they weren't, they were movers and shakers. They ran the church; they ran the community places; they made sure that if someone didn't have paperwork done or didn't understand it they came to your house and they helped you fill out those papers. They were legal advisors; if someone was pounding on somebody else, and that was the case often, you found sanctuary with different people. In those days, you didn't call the police, Black families didn't call the police. You didn't call unknown people, you didn't call White people, you worked it out within your own community, thus within your own home, well you tried.

When Melissa is called to make presentations in schools about racial equity, behavior modification, prejudice, discrimination, etc., she doesn't make formal presentations, she enters into conversations with students. Melissa said,

I always keep the conversation open to find out what they need to hear, what kind of issues are really behind some of the things they are saying. Students like to talk if you give them a forum to do it. Sometimes there are some real anger issues that come out. We try to deal with that. Before we move on, I want to make sure that they all have an opportunity to discuss it and learn from it.

Melissa's approach is focused on respect for others, and making sure that each student is given the opportunity to share his/her opinion. As shared by Carr and Klassen (1997), "a big part of teaching is helping students develop into solid citizens with a respect for and tolerance of others' difference. This is Canadian culture" (p. 74).

Positive Attitude

Having a positive attitude is crucial for success. Sebastian has seen so many individuals in the African-Canadian community get weighed down with their past. Yet, he said:

We need to know our past, but we need to live in the present, and plan for the future. You need the skills and the education to think, to reflect, to do your work. It is those who have the skills and the competencies, and who complete their education, who will have a brighter future.

Andrew often spoke often of having a positive attitude. Too often he has met individuals in education who think they have been disadvantaged. He believes that "they focus too much on the past, on unfairness and injustice, when they should be putting their energy to the future, to developing their skills to be successful." Andrew concluded if they were to change their attitude, more positive results would occur in their lives.

Building Relationships and a Caring Attitude

A critical factor for success is the value that is placed on relationships: relationships with self, with others, with the systems and structures of education. Naomi emphasized the importance of establishing networks and supports for oneself. She said,

Everyone needs a place where you can go and say this is my experience, how you dealt with it, and be able to ask how you think I should deal with it.

Another critical factor for success is to focus on others, rather than yourself. Andrew explained:

If you look at education as helping young people grow, as helping others grow and become contributing citizens, then you are going to become a successful educator. Those teachers who have a caring attitude to the students, are more likely to have students engaged in what they are teaching, because I think: 'Students don't care about what you know until they know that you care about them.'

Creating and maintaining relationships is crucial to Melissa's way of life. Melissa

considers herself to be a very open individual who is genuinely interested in other people. Melissa explained, "It's about getting to know people, not just say 'hi,' but really get to know them, because it does matter, it does something to your life as well." Getting to know people helps to build relationships. Being in relationships with others creates the foundation to enter into conversations with others to help to identify ways to address racial equity, to ask challenging questions, and to find ways to be inclusive, providing a space for all voices to be heard and listened to.

Relationship building is crucial for David. He believes that affecting change does not come from policies or programs. He said:

> *The best way to do that is to have more African Nova Scotian teachers in the education system. Being able to sit down with someone whom you've developed a relationship with and a certain degree of trust, and being able to explain things through a different set of eyes is probably the most effective way to make that change.*

Sebastian spoke of the importance of having a good working relationship with those in charge in the school, the principal in particular. In this way, he can establish how to access what he needs to be successful, for example, the materials and resources which he needs to support the curriculum and his students. He also shared the importance of establishing a good relationship with the parents of the students. He often asks himself, "Have I communicated well with parents and students, the expectations I have? Do parents have confidence in me"?

Conclusion

The participants have been successful as demonstrated in their academic qualifications and leadership positions. They indicated several factors for their success. One factor was the importance of having someone believe in them, whether this be a member of their family or community, a teacher, a neighbor, an employer, or a friend. In all cases, when they were discouraged, they recalled and were encouraged by the words, "You can do it, just keep going." They always knew that they had the support of family and community. These people provided strong reasons for them to continue.

Role models proved to be essential. To see someone whom they knew, whether a teacher, a family member, or a member of the community in the role they dreamed of also often provided the incentive for them to continue.

Building relationships is so crucial in all that we do. These educators talked about the importance of having good working relationships with their colleagues and employer. In so doing, they received the support and resources that they needed to teach their students. It is a way to eliminate some of the isolation experienced when they were the only African-Canadian educator at work. Having someone with whom a person could really say what he/she thinks and feel, or having someone understand and listen to you have been an important factors for their success.

One factor that is very evident was their determination to succeed and a positive attitude. In some cases, the educators had to work at all kinds of jobs to have the financial means to continue their studies. For those who left their own country to come to Canada,

it took tremendous courage and determination to come to a country where they are a minority, and where they didn't know whether they would be accepted. Yet, in all cases, participants shared their appreciation for being given the opportunity to become Canadians. Their self-determination and positive attitude helped them overcome the obstacles they faced.

Implications

The importance of having strong academic qualifications needs to be emphasized. With these qualifications, the participants had the self-confidence and credentials to compete. This is an important aspect that needs to be stressed with all educators and for students. However, it is also important to have a caring attitude when working with students. As one educator stated, "Students don't care about what you know, until they know that you care about them."

Based on my findings, this research indicates some of the factors that can lead African-Canadians to become educators and provides insight into how to support them once they begin to teach. Numerous other researchers have argued for the importance of having African-Canadian educators in our schools to provide all students and all teachers the opportunity to establish relationships, to enter into dialogue, and to learn from one another. Teachers really can make a difference to students if they acknowledge their potential, encourage them to develop it, and to go on to further studies. Many boards of education have recognized that it is time to find ways to infuse African heritage into all aspects of the curriculum. This paper offers important suggestions for how the education community can encourage more African Canadians to enter the profession. In this way, the lives of students and educators will be enriched.

Notes

[1.] Individuals of African heritage use the term African American, African Canadians, African Nova Scotians to identify themselves.

[2.] I use the term *life history* to describe the written account of the lives of ten African Canadian educators, a narrative account based upon conversations and semi-structured interviews. The *life history* method has been used across disciplines: in medicine, sociology, history, education, anthropology (Denzin, 1989; Warren, 1982).

[3.] The Race Relations and Cross Cultural Understanding Coordinators (RCH) were placed in school boards across Nova Scotia to ensure the support of Black learners for the development and delivery of programs and to address issues of discrimination.

[4.] The African Canadian Services Division (ACSD) was established in 1996, as a recommendation of the BLAC report. The goal of ACSD is to ensure that African heritage be an integral part of all elements of the programs, in the resources, in professional development, in the development and delivery of all curricula, and to support Black teachers.

5. The Black Learners Advisory Report (BLAC) was published in 1994 by the Black Learners Advisory Committee, to support the education of African Nova Scotians. This report made several recommendations: the establishment of the Council of African Canadian Education(CACE); the establishment of the African Canadian Services Division at the department of education; the establishment of scholarships to support Black learners for post-secondary education, the establishment and maintenance of RCH coordinators in all school boards, the provision of Support Workers for Black learners in schools, the establishment of the 4Plus programs for young Black learners, etc.

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