Empowering African-American males in special education to succeed: an exploratory study

Leslie Scott-Bowles
Clark Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations

Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation
EMPOWERING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION TO SUCCEED: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

This study explored the use of culture-based empowerment curricula in empowering a group of African-American male special education students to succeed. The Generalized Expectancy to Succeed Scale was used to measure the generalized expectancy to succeed among 8 severely emotionally disturbed adolescent males. The program outcomes assessed included increases and decreases in expectancy to succeed. The findings revealed that the students studied did not have a high expectancy to succeed and that the culture-based curriculum did not have an impact on their expectancy to succeed. Social work implications related to empowering African-American males are addressed.
EMPOWERING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION TO SUCCEED: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE

BY

LESLIE SCOTT-BOWLES

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY 1997
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ........................................................................................................ iii

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................. 1
   Statement of the Problem .................................................................................. 1
   Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................... 3

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ..................................................................... 5
   Compensatory Education Programs ............................................................... 5
   Teacher Expectations .................................................................................... 7
   Raising the Expectations of Students ............................................................. 8
   Cultural Understanding .................................................................................. 9
   Theoretical Framework ................................................................................. 11
   Statement of the Research Questions .......................................................... 15
   Definition of Terms ...................................................................................... 15

III. METHODOLOGY ............................................................................................ 17
   Setting ........................................................................................................... 17
   Participants .................................................................................................... 17
   Outcome Measure ......................................................................................... 18
   Intervention Program .................................................................................... 19
   Procedure ....................................................................................................... 19

IV. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS ..................................................................... 21

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS .................................................................. 22
   Limitations of the Study ............................................................................... 23
   Suggestions for Future Research ................................................................. 24

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE ..................................... 25

APPENDICES ....................................................................................................... 26
   Appendix A .................................................................................................... 27
   Appendix B .................................................................................................... 28

BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................................. 37
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pretest and Posttest Scores of Generalized Expectancy to Succeed Scale</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historically, evaluations of school failure among African-American students have examined deficits in student performance or capability, focusing on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral problems, perception difficulties, and lack of motivation. 1 Although these individual factors are important, they may lead to premature labeling and victimization. For example, African-American students are over represented in special education classes, classes for emotionally disturbed and behavior disordered students, classes for the educable mentally retarded, and under represented in classes for the gifted student. "While African-American children nationwide comprise approximately 17 percent of all children in public schools, they represent 41 percent of all children in special education, 85 percent of them are African-American males." 2 Hence, teachers may interact with students as if they were a bundle of labels or deficiencies, rather than considering settings and systems as part of the problem or solution.

Statement of the Problem

Several theorists have indicated and numerous studies have confirmed that school factors are related to school failure among African-American and other minority

---


students. The failure of schools to educate African-American students has been an issue of concern for nearly a decade. A 1987 study of high schools in New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston, reported that barely a third of the graduates read above the national average. A quarter of the graduates read below the ninth-grade level. And, only a fifth of the entering class of 1984 both graduated and read above the national average. Studies examining math and science scores show similar results of failure.

Students who fail in school experience greater failure and participate less in extracurricular activities, have an increased tendency to drop out of school, engage in frequent misbehavior, and commit more delinquent acts. Several studies have indicated a correlation between school failure and delinquent behavior. School failure has long term effects on the future life of an individual. In a study for a business group in Minnesota, Howard Berman reported that among the graduates in Minnesota there is a persistent problem of illiteracy and a failure to learn to reason or to think creatively. Thus, creating

---


poor job performance. African-Americans that fail in school are at greater risk of
unemployment, low labor force participation, higher health risks, incarceration and
homicide. Barriers to education limit the chance for achievement and attainment of skills.
This limitation can, in turn, lead to poverty or stress in relationships, which interferes with
adequate performance of family roles. Strains in the family's roles causes problems in
individual growth and development and limit the opportunities of families to meet their
own needs or to organize to improve their communities.6

Purpose of the Study

Many African-American educators believe that the solution to ending school
failure among African-American students lie within a culture-based curriculum. Despite
this belief, very little empirical evidence exist supporting proposed solutions that include
culture-based curriculums. The present study examined a culture-based empowerment
curriculum by Mychal Wynn entitled, Empowering African-American Males to Succeed:
A Ten-Step Approach for Parents and Teachers.7 Wynn's culture-based empowerment
activities and techniques were created specifically with African-American male learning
styles in mind. African-American male students were given exercises targeted to raise
their self-awareness and affirm their individual and collective greatness. Students were

6 E. Pinderhughes, "Afro-American Families and the Victim System," In M. McGoldrick, J.K.

7 Mychal Wynn, Empowering African American Males to Succeed: A Ten-Step Approach for
encouraged to focus on extraordinary goals and helped to identify the objectives needed to reach them. The present study examined the approach that given the opportunity to succeed and considering ones cultural characteristics, one would succeed in school despite external factors. The focus was on a school-based solution to ending school failure. Objectives involved increasing the ability of schools to educate diverse types of children with a diversity of learning styles. This study took the step to encourage teachers to address their individual values and expectations of their students. Teachers were given a variety of exercises that help them identify their personal values and characteristics and compare those with the values and characteristics of their students. Exploring the use of culture-based curriculums in increasing the expectancy to succeed among African-American students will allow support for culture-based curriculums in ending school failure.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature on school failure presents various proposed solutions for the prevention of school failure among minorities and the poor. Some of these hypothesized solutions involve school-based interventions. Others involve more global or societal-based interventions, and still others involve a combination of societal-based interventions and school-based interventions. Solutions offered to prevent school failure include: compensatory education programs, raising the expectations of our schools to meet the needs of minority students, raising the expectations of minority students to succeed, and increasing cultural understanding.¹

Compensatory Education Programs

Some educators and theorists point to events external to the classroom as having a greater effect on students learning than anything teachers or schools do. They concluded that poverty, poor health, home and community environment cause certain students to be culturally deprived. They feel that “all students are not educable and that the school can do little to overcome the problems of the home, community, and even the genetic make-up

of the students. For this reason, compensatory education programs were developed. An example of compensatory education programs is the Chapter I program. The Chapter I Program, formerly known as Title I- Better Schooling for Educationally Deprived Children, was developed in 1965. It was developed by Congress and stemmed from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The program was formed as part of President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society and was established to help financially and educationally disadvantaged school-age children catch up with their peers. This approach to ending school failure is not working. The Department of Education conducted a study which found that the achievement level of Chapter I students has fallen for all groups tested except seventh-grade reading. From the third grade to the fourth grade, the achievement level of the average Chapter I student fell from the 26th percentile to the 23rd percentile in reading. In math, scores dropped from the 27th percentile to the 24th. The only longitudinal study ever done on the program, tracking annual test scores for Chapter I students, found that student achievement is deteriorating and not improving. These findings indicate that individual factors can not be the sole focus of decreasing school failure. Instead, an ecological and holistic approach that focus on the whole person and their interaction with their environment much be used.


Teacher Expectations

Other educators and theorists indicate that since Black children are often viewed by their teachers as incapable of success, they tend to perform at low levels and internalize negative feelings.\(^4\) For Black children, as is the case with other minority children usually possessing values differing from those of their teachers, little of what the teachers say or the attitudes instilled are considered related to their life outside the school. Therefore, a major solution to ending school failure is to raise teacher's expectations of their students. Very few system-oriented school change programs with the majority of interventions directed at improving teacher effectiveness in the classroom exist. Sarason and his colleagues argue that "schools will not change, until our teaching about teaching changes."\(^5\) Thus, until an administrative step is taken to address teacher expectations, school expectations will not be met.

Working with an expectancy communication model for intervention, Weinstein, Soule, Collins, Cone, Mehlhorn, and Simontacchi developed a system-oriented program to prevent school failure. The study described the multilevel outcomes of a collaborative prevention intervention for ninth-graders at risk for school failure using qualitative and quasi-experimental methods. Changes were made in the practices of curriculum,


grouping, evaluation, motivation, student responsibility, and relationships in the
classroom. Project teachers became more positive about students and colleagues,
expanded their roles, and changed school tracking policies. The 158 project students, in
contrast to the 154 comparison students showed improved grades and disciplinary
referrals post-intervention and increased retention in school one year later. The
expectancy communication model is based on the idea of shifting the focus from blaming
students and their parents for school failure to making schools responsible for their
students.6

Raising the Expectations of Students

Useni Eugene Perkins quoted an illustration used by Booker T. Washington:

"When a white boy undertakes a task, it is taken for granted that he will succeed. On the
other hand, people are usually surprised if the Negro boy does not fail. In a word, the
Negro youth starts out with the presumption against him."7 Many African-American male
students do not feel that anyone expects them to succeed. Therefore, they do not expect
that they will succeed. A simple solution suggested to increase school success is to simply
encourage it. Wynn discussed teaching African-American students words that have "life-
giving" power. He encouraged parents, teachers, community members, anyone that has

6 Rhona S. Weinstein et al, "Expectations and High School Change: Teacher - Researcher
Collaboration to Prevent School Failure," American Journal of Community Psychology, vol. 19, no. 3,

contact with African-American youth to constantly offer them affirmations. The March 2nd edition of the *Economist*, illustrates an article entitled “I Can Do Anything” portraying Jeffrey Howard, a social psychologist and president of the Efficacy Institute in Lexington, Massachusetts. According to Howard, “if black students gain confidence, they will try harder, and if they try harder, they will succeed.” On a standard test the third-grade students, whose teachers were guided by the philosophies of the Efficacy Institute, performed much better than their peers in a regular education program.

**Cultural Understanding**

Wade Nobles stated that “when we look at the notion of culture and raise the question of accessing children to a core curriculum, we should be very clear that the core curriculum itself is cultural; and that the teaching methodology that we utilize in teaching the core curriculum is also cultural; and that the site leadership style is cultural; and that the guidance and counsel activities are cultural, and that the instructional strategies are cultural, and that the school climate is cultural, and that ultimately the aim and purpose of education itself is cultural.” In essence, Nobles is saying that the entire school experience should be cultural. Jerome Harris is another advocate of culture-based

---


curriculums. Harris indicates that it is the "culture" that must be the focus of change.

"The key," says Harris, "is to change the mind-set and the heart-set of all members of the school community." Harris discussed the issue of politics within the school system. He stated that "the success of the adults is not the success of the students." In other words, the school system has lost focus of its' goal, which should be the success of students. Instead, school systems have focused on individual goals of recognition and success.

Without understanding the cultural characteristics of students, it is impossible to develop a curriculum relevant to their lives. One of the major causes that researchers give for school failure is that students do not see the relevance of what they learn in school to what they need to succeed in life. To understand the learning differences among students you must first obtain an understanding of their culture. An important benefit of cultural understanding, is that, by understanding cultural characteristics of students you gain an insight into their behavioral characteristics. Due to a lack of cultural understanding, character traits are being misunderstood as emotional disturbances or behavior disorders. African-American males are disproportionately represented in special education programs for emotionally disturbed and behavior disordered students. Norby,


Thurlow, Christenson, and Ysseldyke state that “special education is viewed as the way to remove students with deviant skills.” Instead of creating a curriculum that allows for different styles of learning, teachers continue to implement teaching styles and techniques that are irrelevant to student success.

In summary, the literature on solutions to end school failure identified school-based interventions, global or societal-based interventions, and a combination of both. The findings indicated that no one solution is most effective in ending school failure. Instead, an ecological approach to empowering African-American students to succeed may be the most promising. The ecological perspective does not represent a swing from primary focus on the student to the other extreme of primary focus on the school. Rather, the ecological perspective focuses on the transactions between the two. Problem-solving efforts may be directed to assisting students to adapt to their school environment, altering the school environment to meet the needs of the students more adequately, or a combination of the two.

Theoretical Framework

Two main concepts of the ecological theory are habitat and niche. Habitat refers to the physical and social settings in which people live within particular cultural contexts. When habitats have adequate resources to grow and develop, people can thrive. When

---

habitats lack resources, the physical, social, emotional development and ongoing functioning of the people may be affected. For example, people with supportive social networks of friends, relatives, neighbors, work and church associates, and pets tend to cope with painful life stresses more effectively. On the other hand, people with little or no social support system may respond to life stresses by becoming severely depressed, resorting to abuse of drugs or alcohol, engaging in violent behavior, or by coping in other dysfunctional ways.

This same concept applies within the school environment. Students with a strong support network within the school system tend to thrive academically. Those with little or no support system tend to respond by engaging in disruptive behavior, skipping or dropping out of school, abusing drugs or alcohol, joining gangs, or by coping in other dysfunctional ways. African-American students tend to have a very limited support system within the school. The deficit view that African-American parents do not interact in the school system because they do not care, is not true. In fact, one of the greater strengths of the African-American culture is its strong family value and worth. A different conceptualization that looks into the low level of parent participation needs to be noted. The ecological perspective looks at the interaction between Black families and the systems within their lives. According to Boyd-Franklin, "Because of the number of social systems that are involved, often intrusively, in the lives of poor Black families, many of whom feel completely overwhelmed by life’s demands and socioeconomic realities, these families
often find that they cannot interact effectively with agencies," such as the school.15 This since of powerlessness within the school system is often enough to keep the parents away.

On the other hand, African-American students do not receive the support they need from school staff either. Overall, teacher expectations and support of African-American children has been very low. The dynamics of teacher expectations and how they can become self-fulfilling prophecies have been illustrated in previous research studies. Studies of effective schools have also pointed to the expectations of principals and teachers as powerful influences on student performance.16 Differential expectations for academic performance can often result in different opportunities to learn and different treatment in school from both teachers and peers. The deficit view of student performance focuses on the student as the problem. It focuses on the student’s individual factors as a cause for low academic achievement. The ecological perspective, however, focuses on how the student and the school environment interact with each other.

Children, even as young as first-graders, can identify differential treatment practices that favor high over low achievers with more opportunities, choice, and positive feedback in the classroom. This indicates that if children are aware of teacher’s differential treatment and infer their smartness from such cues, a potential regression of motivation for children

---


hands. Building up our young men and empowering them will also require a collective effort. Building blocks allow every aspect necessary in empowering our young men to be successful to be focused on in a developmental processes. Each building block represents a step toward success. The final block equals success. Each building block contains various culture-based empowerment activities and techniques. Wynn’s ten-steps to empowering African-American males to succeed include: cultural understanding, mutual respect/character development, personal responsibility, teacher/parent expectations, focus/identify goals, visualization, affirmation, integrate curriculum/home, a passion for excellence, and empowerment.¹⁸

**Statement of the Research Questions**

The following research questions were investigated in this study: (a) Do African-American male youths expect to experience future success? and (B) What is the impact of culture-based curriculums on the expectancy to succeed among a group of African-American male special education students?

**Definition of Terms**

The Generalized Expectancy For Success Scale (GESS) is defined by Bobbi Fibel and W. Daniel Hale as “the belief that in most situations one is able to obtain desired outcomes.”

goals." A culture-based curriculum is just that, a curriculum based on the characteristics of a culture. Wynn indicated the following as characteristics common among African-Americans: humanistic values, extended family, bonding, culturally distinctive speech, use of non-verbal communication, and high stress communities and households.20

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Setting

The program in which participants were selected is located within a wing of an urban city school. The adolescent students in the program receive services through the program, but are mainstreamed into regular classes within the school. All the students in the program were diagnosed with severe emotional disturbances, but most have other diagnosis as well. The program is divided into two classes; behavioral disorders and mental retardation. The researcher chose to use the classroom serving severally emotionally disturbed/behavior disorder students in order to contrast findings with literature that attribute school failure to students individual behavior. Program staff include a psychologist, social worker, 3 teachers and 3 paraprofessionals. Other community agencies provide services to the program, including a psychiatrist, speech therapist and behavior aid. All services are provided within the school setting or in the home.

Participants

At the time the study was conducted, there were 11 severely emotionally disturbed adolescent males in the special education program. Some of the students were dual diagnosed with behavior disorders. The students were referred from various other schools due to their emotional disturbances. The following are representative descriptive characteristics of the adolescents served by the adolescent program: “chronic, general
fearfulness and anxiety, prefers fantasy to reality, out of contact with reality, daydreaming more often than interacting, consistently bizarre speech or behavior, nonexistent or extremely poor peer relationships, potentially dangerous to himself or herself, long-term problems with adjustment to society’s values and patterns, recent developments of difficulties with authorities, disturbances shown across all environments- home, school and community, and failure to respond to other programs or interventions.” Students remain in the program until the goals established by their individualized education plan are met.

**Outcome Measure**

In the present study, the variable expectancy to succeed was measured. The Generalized Expectancy to Succeed Scale (GESS) is a 30-item scale designed to measure an individuals generalized expectancy of becoming successful. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = highly improbable to 5 = highly probable. According to authors, Fibel and Hale, the concept of the GESS is related to anxiety and negative cognition often associated with depression, and suicidal ideation. The GESS measures three aspects of generalized expectancy: general efficacy, long range career oriented expectancy, personal problem solving, and a fourth factor which has no consistent theme. The GESS’s internal consistency using coefficient alpha is .90 for females and .91 for males. Test-retest reliability for a six-week period is .83 for both genders. The validity of the GESS has been

---

tested primarily with concurrent validity procedures. Scores are not associated with social desirability for males, but are correlated for females.  

**Intervention Program**

The intervention focused on achieving an adaptive fit between the student and the school environment to raise expectations for performance and motivate the students to become successful. The researcher met with the classroom teachers to explain the purpose of the study and to receive their consent in participation. Every staff member participated and was in-serviced on the empowerment curriculum. Once in-serviced, the activities described in Wynn’s empowerment curriculum were then applied to the teaching staff’s daily curriculum. The intervention program was implemented over a six-week period. The ten blocks to success and the activities used in each block are described in Appendix B.

**Procedure**

The design used was a pretest/posttest design. First, the GESS was administered to the students to measure their expected ability to succeed in life. Then, the intervention program was implemented over a six-week period. Following the intervention program, the students were given the GESS again as a posttest measure. The posttest was used to

---

measure whether or not the intervention program used was effective in increasing the student’s expectancy to succeed.
CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Three of the eleven students enrolled in the class did not participate due to excessive absenteeism. The remaining 8 participant’s average age was 15 years, and they were all African-American males. The majority of the participants were dual diagnosed with behavior disorders. Three of the eight boys were raised in 2 parent or 2 guardian homes. The average participant’s family ranged in the lower socioeconomic status group. Each participant were at a high risk for school failure. Table 1 presents the pretest scores and posttest scores on the generalized expectancy to succeed scale. Scores ranged from 30 - 150. Higher scores reflect internal control of success and lower scores reflect an inability to control one’s future success. During the intervention program period, three students were withdrawn from the program. One student moved and the other two were referred to other agencies.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #1</th>
<th>Student #2</th>
<th>Student #3</th>
<th>Student #4</th>
<th>Student #5</th>
<th>Student #6</th>
<th>Student #7</th>
<th>Student #8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posttest</td>
<td>39.1</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>474.8</td>
<td>281.19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study set out to answer the following questions: (a) Do African-American youths expect to experience future success? and (b) What is the impact of culture-based empowerment curriculums on the expectancy to succeed among a group of African-American males in special education? The results revealed that the students studied have a very low expectancy to succeed in life. The results further show that after being exposed to culture-based empowerment curricula, the students expectancy to succeed did not increase. In fact, scores showed a slight decrease in the expectancy to succeed.

Following the intervention procedure and post test, the researcher discussed the curriculum with the group of students to get feedback as to what they liked and did not like about the activities over the past six weeks. When asked what was the main thing they had learned, the major response was that they could succeed in life, go to college, get a job, and support a family. The group almost harmoniously responded to that question in that exact order, which indicated that the students picked up on the fact that their goals must be prioritized. Another major point the students identified was that they have a choice to succeed and that nobody is as responsible for their success as themselves. Many students indicated that they enjoyed the guest that visited the class most of all. Some stated that the guest that came and lectured to them were boring, but they liked it when guests came and sat in on group discussions and gave their input. The students also indicated that the activities that they did made them feel like someone really cared and was
concerned as to whether they made it in life. Despite the positive verbal feedback received from the students, the scores implicate a less positive result of the study. The researcher suggests that the following limitations may have caused the results.

**Limitations of the Study**

Several factors may have effected the results of the present study. First, a larger group of students may have produced more informative results. The small sample of students studied may not have been enough to provide the researcher with adequate enough data to come to a reliable conclusion of the impact of the culture-based curriculum. Second, the fact that several students left the program during the intervention program, may have had some type of adverse effect on the results. Third, the outcome measure was never validated with the present population. Fourth, several words used in the measurement tool may have been too complex for high school students to understand. During testing, the researcher encouraged the group to ask questions if they were uncertain as to what a particular statement was trying to imply. Very few asked for assistance. Fifth, six weeks may not have been sufficient enough time to effect a group of an oppressed culture’s expectancy to succeed, who for decades have been told that they could not.
Suggestions for Future Research

The school should continue to be a major area of research despite the findings of the present study. Research with a larger sample size is highly encouraged. The development of an instrument targeted towards youth, which measures success as the African-American culture would see it, may produce more accurate results. Also, longitudinal studies of programs incorporating culture-based curriculums into their course content may give a clearer picture of the importance one’s culture may play in their learning. Longitudinal research would allow researchers to see if students in programs with culture-based curriculums really do grow up and become more successful and more self-sufficient.
CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The problem of school failure among African-American students implies a number of implications for the field of social work. Social workers in the school setting can take an informed stance on the importance of cultural understanding and educate school staff and administrators. Social workers can advocate for culture-based curriculums and support this concept with their knowledge of the ecological framework. One's habitat or cultural context plays a role in their ability to thrive in school. Social workers can advocate for programs that focus on the importance of minority children adjusting to their school community. Social workers may also develop collaborations for school staff. Collaborations offer self-disclosure, support, and may lead to new and innovative ideas. Social workers may also become visible in the community and encourage community members to adopt a school. Mentor programs have been proven to motivate success. Lastly, social workers can lobby for education reform which includes a budget for creating programs to increase cultural awareness in the school. Raising and educating children is a partnership of parents, schools, and community members. Social workers are a catalyst which keeps this partnership going.
APPENDICES
Appendix A

The Generalized Expectancy for Success Scale (GESS)

Please indicate the degree to which you believe each statement would apply to you personally by indicating to the left of the item the appropriate number, according to the following key:

1 = Highly improbable
2 = Improbable
3 = Equally improbable and probable, not sure
4 = Probable
5 = Highly probable

In the future I expect that I will...

1. Find that people don't seem to understand what I am trying to say.
2. Be discouraged about my ability to gain the respect of others.
3. Be a good parent.
4. Be unable to accomplish my goals.
5. Have a stressful marital relationship.
6. Deal poorly with emergency situations.
7. Find my efforts to change situations I don't like are ineffective.
8. Not be very good at learning new skills.
9. Carry through my responsibilities successfully.
10. Discover that the good in life outweighs the bad.
11. Handle unexpected problems successfully.
12. Get the promotions I deserve.
13. Succeed in the projects I undertake.
14. Not make any significant contributions to society.
15. Discover that my life is not getting much better.
16. Be listened to when I speak.
17. Discover that my plans don't work out too well.
18. Find that no matter how hard I try, things just don't turn out the way I would like.
19. Handle myself well in whatever situation I'm in.
20. Be able to solve my own problems.
21. Succeed at most things I try.
22. Be successful in my endeavors in the long run.
23. Be very successful working out my personal life.
24. Experience many failures in my life.
25. Make a good first impression on people I meet for the first time.
26. Attain the career goals I have set for myself.
27. Have difficulty dealing with my superiors.
28. Have problems working with others.
29. Be a good judge of what it takes to get ahead.
30. Achieve recognition in my profession.
Appendix B
Culture-Based Empowerment Activities

Block #1 - Cultural Understanding

Activity #1

The objective of this activity is to find out as much as you can about your students by getting them to list their role models, family environment, cultural characteristics, and personal characteristics on a blank sheet of paper. Underneath their list of characteristics, have them list their goals. If they have never developed any, help them to do so. This activity will allow them to become aware of who they are and begin to think about what they want to be.

Activity #2

This activity builds on the former activity. In this activity, get your young men to list their favorite hobbies, foods, clothes, sports, dances, songs, etc. Use these papers to gain greater insight into the personal differences and cultural commonality of your young men. Use this information to identify the types of activities which motivate them personally and culturally. Keep these sheets of paper and repeat the same exercise at the end of the school year. As your young men grow, learn, gain confidence, self-esteem, and develop a more positive self-image, they will begin to identify new role models, expand their hobbies, and the activities that they enjoy.
**Activity #3**

Have your young men complete a one-page paper (e.g., narrative, rap, poem, etc.) for each of the following topics: what do I want to be, what does it mean to be a man, what does it mean to be a father, and who do I most admire and why? Use these responses to stimulate a classroom or one-on-one discussion. Encourage your young men to share and articulate their feelings while being careful to keep the discussion positively focused, restricting laughter, mocking, and name-calling. Keep these papers for now. Repeat this exercise after completing the other activities in the pyramid.

**Activity #4**

The objective of this activity is to get your young men to see the effect that words have on themselves and others. To do this, discuss the history of “The Dozens.” Discuss with them the tradition in ancient Africa. Tell them how young men of the village would say words about each other and their fathers as a rite of passage into manhood. Expand the discussion to include why we say such negative words to each other. Find out who is the best at the dozens. Challenge that person to a duel. However, add a new twist. The challenge is to say the most positive, encouraging, uplifting, supportive, and loving words. Start the game and get other young men involved.
Block #2 - Mutual Respect/Character Development

Activity #5

Through various discussions and activities, develop a code of conduct that your young men will adhere to at all times. Focus on how the code of conduct will help them in achieving their goals. Discuss how their attitude and character will affect how they respond to the challenges and obstacles confronting them.

Block #3 - Personal Responsibility

Activity #6

Give your young men responsibilities in the classroom, such as collecting homework or taking the attendance. These responsibilities will allow your students to feel like they are a viable and valuable part of their classroom and it will give them self-worth and raise their self-esteem. Assigning task will give the students ownership of their class roles and hold them responsible if they do not do their part.

Activity #7

Help your young men develop the thinking and reasoning skills needed to make life-saving decisions. Parents should engage in regular discussions with their sons about why they should be responsible. Discuss with them what types of responsibilities they

---

must assume to be the head of the household (e.g., budget planning, professional employment, running a business, running a household, etc.).

**Activity #8**

Discuss the poem “A Man Is...”\(^2\) Ask your young men to describe how the poem relates to their own experiences. This exercise allows your young men to see what characteristics make a man and which ones do not. It will allow them to see what responsibilities a man has and take ownership of them.

**Block #4 - Teacher/Parent Expectations**

**Activity #9**

At the beginning of the school year, outline for your young men what you intend to accomplish. Engage in a discussion about their dreams, their future, the current situation of African-Americans, and what you intend to do to assist them in achieving their goals. After helping to identify their goals you are going to make a commitment to ensure that they have every opportunity to achieve their goals. Whether or not they achieve their goals will depend entirely upon whether or not they have the commitment and determination to achieve them.

---

Activity #10

At the beginning of the school year, have your young men take a sheet of paper and draw a frame around it so that the sheet of paper represents a mirror. Have them write inside the mirror how they see themselves. Do the same thing for yourself. Take the papers and write on them how you see the individual. This simple exercise will help you see the potential in our young men and help them see the greatness in themselves. Make copies of the papers with your comments for your file and return the originals. Repeat this exercise at the end of the school year.

Block #5 - Focus/Identify Goals

Activity #11

Have men (teachers, coaches, principals, custodians, etc.) involved at your school make regular visits to your classroom. If there are enough men in your school have them adopt a student. Have professional men in the community arrange a few hours on a regular basis that they can visit your class each month. Have these men talk to your young men about setting goals and concepts such as perseverance, inner strength, and characteristics that are needed to achieve their goals. This activity will allow your young men to see, touch and hear men with whom they can identify and who believe in them.

Activity #12

Have your young men write down their goals. List every goal on a sheet of paper to be distributed or posted. Have your young men develop a list of fantasy goals, e.g., to
become President, a billionaire, to own a million dollar home, etc. Encourage them to
dream of their highest and most outrageous fantasies. Select several goals from each list
and have a discussion identifying the things needed and steps to be taken to achieve the
goal on each list. This activity will help to change the attitudes about their ability to
achieve their goals. It will also demonstrate that even goals considered outrageous are
achievable when we can identify the steps required in achieving them.

**Activity #13**

The objective of this activity is to have your students research their career options
and what steps they must take to reach their career goals. Supply your student with
everything they need to research their career, i.e. vocational outlook handbooks, college
admissions book, magazine articles, etc. This activity will allow your students to identify
and get a realistic view of what it will actually take to reach their goals.

**Block #6 - Visualization**

**Activity #14**

Set aside some quit time in the morning before school and in the evening at home.
Have your young men close their eyes and focus on their goals. Encourage them to see
themselves achieving their goals and feel themselves standing in victory. Parents should
have their sons' include their goals in their nightly prayers. Parents should also join their
sons' in prayer in affirming their goals. Help them to visualize overcoming the obstacles and challenges in their lives.

**Activity #15**

Begin to set goals for and to visualize extraordinary achievement. Routinely engage your students in discussions about their goals. Constantly affirm their goals. Have your students read books about their goals and share or report on what they’ve read. Get them in habit of discussing their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. Introduce your young men to books about great African-American men who have achieved and discuss with them how their lives compare with the lives of those men. Ask them to visualize the success that these men experienced.

**Block #6 - Affirmation**

**Activity #16**

Teach your young men affirmations they can use to affirm their goals. Post these affirmations around the classroom. Give each student an affirmation a day. Identify quotations and poems that will help them to visualize and affirm their goals. Display these throughout your home or classroom, his bedroom, walls, etc. Periodically ask your young men to recite them.
Block #7 - Integrate Curriculum/Home

Activity #17

Take two sheets of paper. Put your name at the top of one and the name of one of your students at the top of another. Write down personal goals, characteristics, and goal accomplishments on each piece of paper. These two sheets of paper represent the two people that make up your team. You must develop a strategy to merge the talents, backgrounds, and experiences in order to achieve a common goal. To integrate these activities into the life of this young man, is to infuse your newly-found understanding of his life, including everything that you can that will empower him to succeed.

Block #9 - A Passion for Excellence

Activity #18

Gather your young men into a group. Distribute a copy of the poem “What Manner of Men are We.” On each copy, highlight one to three consecutive lines for each child to recite. After you’ve highlighted all the lines in the poem, work with this group to prepare an oral recitation. First, let the young men recite their lines with out any coaching. Then, recite the poem for them. Now have them repeat the poem. After you’ve repeated this poem several times, you should begin to see their competitive nature coming out. As you continue to coach them, encourage them to step forward when it’s

their turn. Encourage them to raise their voices; inject some emotion; move their arms; and dramatically express themselves. Encourage them to establish eye contact with you while they’re reciting their parts. With continued practice and encouragement you will begin to see increased self-pride and self-confidence.

After completing the activities in block #9, your young men will have reached the final block in our pyramid - empowerment! Your young men by this time are beginning to believe in themselves and their ability to reach their goals no matter what the obstacle.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Armor, David J. “The Fate of Black America: IV.” The Public Interest. vol. 8, no. 2 (October 1994).


