

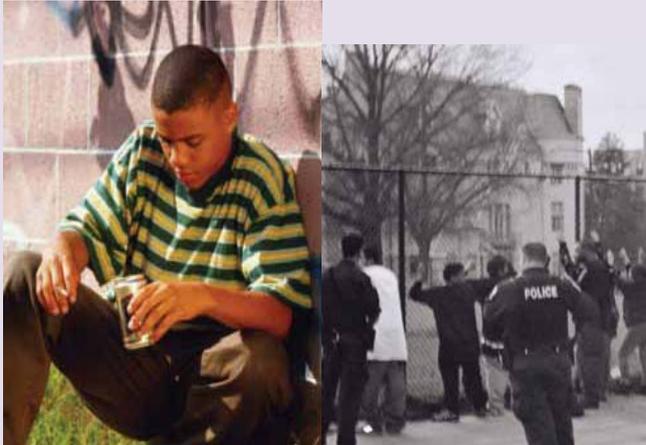
Graduating Black Males

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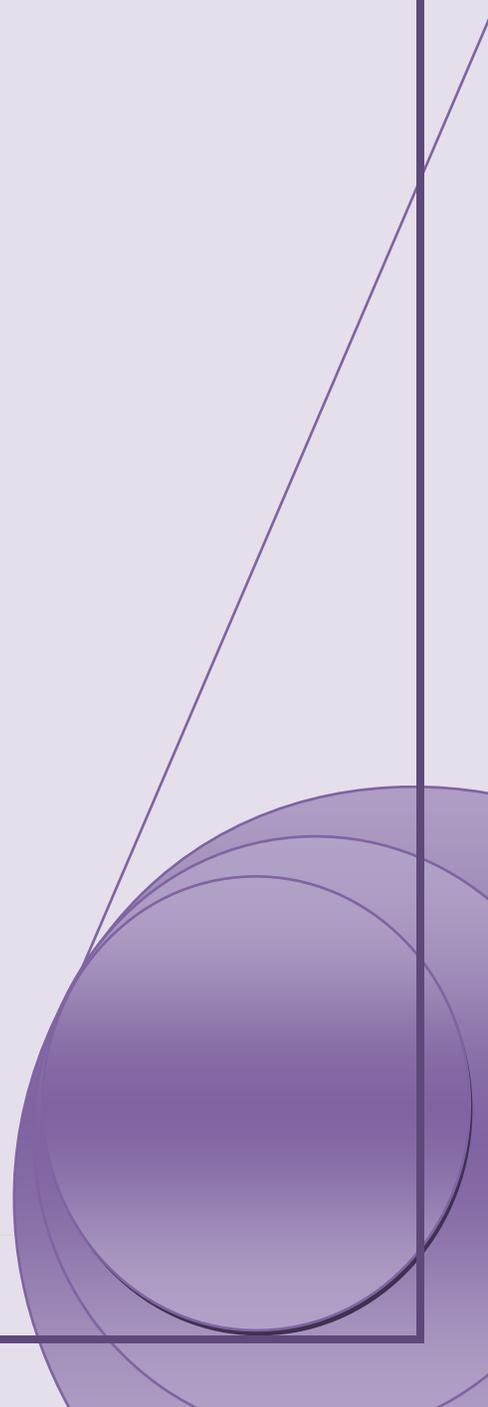
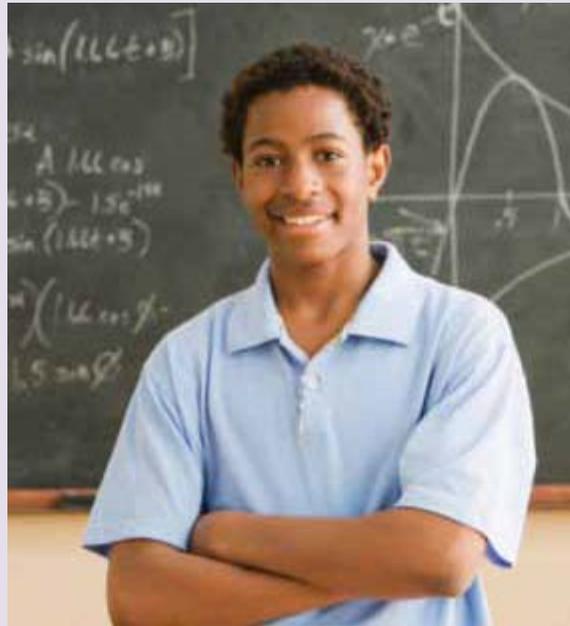
GRADUATING BLACK MALES



WHY BLACK MALES DROP OUT

The graduation numbers for Black males are dismal, chilling, and undeniably pathetic. The nation graduates only 47% of Black males who enters the 9th grade. The infusion of federal dollars and philanthropic support will not stop the trajectory of Black males who drop out of school.

Dr. Edward Earl Bell



Abstract:

Background: The graduation numbers for Black males are dismal, chilling, and undeniably pathetic. The nation graduates only 47% of Black males who enter the 9th grade. The infusion of federal dollars and philanthropic support will not stop the trajectory of Black males who drop out of school. Black males face an upheaval educational battle; their graduation statistics are sobering across America.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to assess why Black males drop out of school and if they are unemployed.

Setting: The research took place in rural North Carolina.

Study Sample: 15 Black males who dropped out of school, aged 18-55.

Intervention: Participants took part in-depth interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis: A qualitative design was best suited for this study. In-depth interviews captured the data. Snowball sampling is a non-probability strategy used in this study. Open-coding and axial coding were used in the data analysis.

Findings: Twenty-six percent of the participants dropped out of school because of academic factors such as school work being too hard and not liking the teacher. However, 73% of the Black males from the study dropped out of school because of non-academic factors such as medical needs, peer pressure, lost of focus, home problems, and hanging with friends, which were the common themes that emerged from the data analysis.

Conclusion: Having rigorous academic standards and a relevant curriculum without building strong social and/or cultural opportunities will net the same results, deplorable graduating numbers for Black males. It is more than just academics.

Graduating Black Males

The graduation numbers for Black males are dismal, chilling, and undeniably pathetic. The nation graduates only 47% of Black males who enter the 9th grade (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). It is not surprising that the education of Black males has been fraught with separate and unequal educational opportunities (Strayhorn, 2008; Garibaldi, 2007). Black males significantly lag behind their counterparts in terms of graduating from high school (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Bell, 2010a). Educators are not entirely to blame for the low achievement of [Black males]; however, when we look at the facts, it is arduous to fathom why Black America have not shouldered more responsibility for the education of every Black male (Smith, 2005).

The infusion of federal dollars and philanthropic support will not stop the trajectory of Black males who drop out of school (Bell, 2010b). Black males are bombarded with a sundry of social and educational issues such as peer pressure or education biases and/or practices that hinder progression towards graduating from high school (Bell, 2009; Bell, 2010a). Strayhorn (2008) concluded in his research that teachers have a lower expectation for the academic achievement of Black males. Enhanced teacher effectiveness, advanced pedagogical practices for teaching Black males, and being highly qualified educators do not seem to keep a comparative number of Black males in school and graduating. The reasons may be numerous; however, the reality is singular in nature. Black males are dropping out of school at alarming rates (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010).

Graduating Black males from high school is a fundamental educational obligation. Black males are extricable linked to the success of this citizenry and the wealth of this nation. Another contention of complexity that obfuscates the education of Black males is the responsibility of this population to educate itself. Graduating Black males from high school must become a narcissistic phenomenon. They must forge a persistent and unyielding need to graduate from high school. The evidence is conclusive given that that no “system” has faltered, no government collapsed, or no economy has become depressed because of the academic failure of Black males. Therefore, if Black males are to be saved and become high school graduates at comparative rates, then, Black males and communities must address the issue of high school completion. Two questions guided the researcher with this project:

- (1) Did Black males drop out of school because of non-academic factors?
- (2) Are the students who dropped out of school currently unemployed?

Literature Review

Black males face an upheaval educational battle. [Black males] are more likely to withdraw from school and thus add to the dropout rate (Osborne, Walker, and Rausch, 2002). There is no doubt that they are failing academically, and are not achieving at parity with their counterparts (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Bell 2009; Bell, 2010a). Leaving the graduation of Black males solely to the educational system is not good science; however, increasing the graduation of Black males necessitates implementing the prose that we vociferously recite—“it takes a village...” And yet, the majority of educators remain complicit in their silence regarding the plight of Black [males] (Smith, 2005).

Black males are often misguided and are broken down mentally by those who lack the capabilities and dispositions to effectively work with them in our nation's classroom (Anthony, Krissonis, and Herrington, 2007; Sen, 2006). More than any times in America, people who are not of the same racial or cultural backgrounds as Black males are now educating more of this population (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, and Garrison-Wade, 2008).

Black Males in Education: Is it Teacher Effectiveness? Or Not!

While the nation wrestles with what is the most appropriate pedagogical style in educating Black males, we cannot dismiss the possibility that teacher effectiveness, in isolation, may not be the panacea for improving the academic performance of Black males (Bell, 2010a/b). Teacher effectiveness can undoubtedly impact student performance (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008; Bell, 2009; Bell, 2010a). Given the demographics and social strata of Black males, effective teachers adapt to the learning styles of diverse students by implementing strategies to afford all [Black males] a fair academic experience (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). As a competing force, Black males are confronted with classroom biases and cultural nuances that interfere with teacher effectiveness and student performance (Bell, 2010a). Teacher effectiveness denotes the ability of teachers to promote student growth (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). Clarifying the definition of teacher effectiveness is important. The five characteristics effective teachers share are:

- (1) effective teachers have high expectations for all students,
- (2) effective teachers contribute to positive academic and social outcomes,
- (3) effective teachers use diverse resources,
- (4) effective teachers contribute to the development of classrooms,

(5) effective teachers collaborate with others (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008).

Being an effective teacher engages all students in the learning process with the aim of positively influencing student growth and academic performance (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008; Rothon, Arephin, Klineberg, Cattell, and Stansfeld, 2010; Bell, 2010; Bell, 2009). Moreover, teacher effectiveness assumes a didactic perspective that transcends culture, biases, and discrimination by assuming that educators can effectively teach all children (Bell, 2010a). Most education advocates concur that the primary benefit of effective teaching is improved student learning (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008).

Academic Socialization

We know from history that teacher effectiveness is not the single factor for increasing student performance (Bell, 2010a). Theories of ethnic minority development have postulated that [Black male] parents engaged in practices that are culturally distinctive (Cooper and Smalls, 2010). [Black] parents may find it necessary to use culturally specific socialization practices to equip [Black males] with the needed competencies for survival in a school setting (Friend, 2009; Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley, 2004). However, research from Cooper and Smalls (2010) has not firmly concluded that socialization domains interact to influence the academic adjustment of [Black males]. Therefore, academic socialization is a construct that must be investigated in terms of its utility in improving the academic performance of Black males. The premise of academic socialization presupposes the contention that Black males come to school with the propensity to learn; they are prepared emotionally, socially, and culturally to navigate a controlled educational environment by possessing the disposition to learn for its intrinsic value (Bell, 2010a; Taylor, Clayton, and Rowley, 2004).

Academic socialization involves preparing Black males for a learning environment (Bell, 2010). It teaches Black males the fundamental social skills necessary to be successful in classrooms such as mutual respect, valuing the learning process, and eliminating disruptive behaviors (Bell, 2010a; Bell, 2009). Appropriate social decorum—such as raising hands; taking turns; and stopping “mama” jokes, loud outbursts, clowning, and other disruptive behaviors—promotes academic socialization in the classroom (Bell, 2010b). Bell (2010a) concluded that Black males are confronted with a multitude of social, academic, and cultural concerns that often time interfere with their academic potential. “Although there has been considerable research on the multitude of parental influences that shape the process of [development], less is known about the specific ways in which parents socialize their [Black males] in terms of school-related behaviors and [academic] outcomes” (Taylor, et al., p. 163). An alarming number of Black males do not come to school ready to learn (Bell, 2009). Black males tend to withdraw from academics, which hampers their school performance (Bell, 2010a/b; Bell, 2009).

Black males must develop the social perquisites to succeed in the educational arena (Bell, 2010a). Staying on task, following directions, and being academically focused are just a few salient recommendations that will undoubtedly increase the graduation of Black males (Bell, 2010a). Black males do possess the ability to demonstrate socialized learning in a teaching environment (Bell, 2010a). For example, the reverence and respect needed in a church setting are principles taught from infancy and nurtured throughout the social development of Black males (Bell, 2010a). Regardless of their socioeconomic status, Black males typically respect church, even if the preacher is **not** effective (Bell, 2010a). If Black males can be taught to respect church, a learning environment, then, teach the same concept for a school environment (Bell, 2010a/b).

Black Male High School Graduation

A crisis looms in the rows of America's public classrooms, especially in aisles where Black males sit. This plight is not new, yet the attention has not garnered a clarion call or a much-needed bruited education discourse across America (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Orfield, Losen, and Wald, 2004). While we fervently discuss the low graduation rates for Black males and while we speak stridently about it, the status quo continues. Black males are not graduating from high school at competitive rates as their counterparts (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Orfield, Losen, and Wald, 2004).

Educating Black males is not a black cause. While the nation has addressed the paucity of Black males graduating in comparison to others, more work needs to be done in communities. The Black community must take on this issue as a Civil Right mandate; graduating Black males must equate to an academic constitution. It is a crisis for America to address. However, the Black community must lead the charge. The failure of Americans to graduate Black males will cost the nation in terms of increased incarceration costs, poverty, and an ill-prepared labor force, which will translate into increased health costs and welfare services (Bell, 2009; Orfield, Losen, and Wald, 2004; Garibaldi, 2007; Smith, 2005; Sen, 2006; Cooper, 2003).

The research is clear and definitive. The reality is that Black males are dropping out of high school before graduation (Heckman and LaFontaine, 2007; Schott Foundation, 2010). The root causes may be debatable; however, the evidence is incontrovertible and appalling. Researchers are not hesitant to report why Black males are consistently falling behind their contemporaries (Smith, 2005; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; National Research Council, 2001; Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison, 2006). The National Research Council (2001) concluded that the issues of schooling, personality dispositions, and the economic conditions of

students might increase the dropout number. In addition, students reported that the major reason for dropping out of school was that classes were not interesting, which fundamentally translated into no classroom motivation (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Bell, 2010a).

Black Male Learning

The social conditions in schools may contribute to the low graduation rates for Black males, coupled with teacher expectations and the absence of academic socialization (Bell, 2010b). The appropriate cultural synchronization of teaching practices and the predilection towards a cultural relevance in the classroom will undoubtedly and successfully educate all students and keep them in school (National Research Council (2001; Cooper, 2003). Teachers must understand the distinct learning styles of Black males that advance student performance such as cooperative learning (Rothon, Arephin, Klineberg, Cattell, and Stansfeld, 2010; Bell, 2009; Bell, 2010a). Research postulated that Black males tended to be more successful in cooperative groups (Rothon, et al., 2010).

Considering the social pathologies plaguing Black males in low-income and fatherless households, placing these students in a failed school paradigm, as opposed to a place where institutions or communities value their contributions and where faith-based options are a compelling solution in educating this population, is academically destructive (Bell, 2010a/b; Anthony, et al., 2007; Cooper, 2003).

Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand why black males drop out of school and if they are employed. Qualitative research is concerned with interpreting human behaviors from the viewpoint of those who have experienced them (Milacci, 2003; Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen, 2006). This study was conducted in the fall of 2010 over a month period. Fifteen Black males, aged 18-55,

participated in the study as result of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is a non-probability strategy used in this study. Snowball sampling is useful for studying hard to reach populations (Goodman, 1961; Russell, 2002). The sample came from rural North Carolina. Each participant verbally consented to participate in the study. Participants participated in in-depth interviews and were asked such questions as “why did you drop out of school and what are you doing now?” Data collected from the interviews were presented as quasi-statistics; however, the use of numerical/quantitative data in qualitative research studies and reports has been controversial (Maxwell, 2010). The methodology involved the qualitative analysis of data collected from the interviews.

The declaration of researcher bias in qualitative inquiry is known (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The researcher is an African American male, who has worked as a middle school teacher and a school counselor. Moreover, the researcher has worked with at-risk African American males and was awarded the prestigious Nancy Susan Reynolds, an award given yearly by the Z Smith Reynolds Foundation, for working with at-risk black males. The researcher’s experiences add credibility to the findings.

The authenticity of the results was maintained by peer examination, member checking, and prolonged engagement of the participants as strategies to ensure the trustworthiness and the credibility of the findings (Byrne, 2001; Shenton, 2003; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) concluded that qualitative research is not based on getting the same results, but whether the results are sensible, dependable, and consistent. Lincoln and Guba (1985) concluded that the extensive use of auditing would ultimately improve data analysis dependability and conformability, leading to more meaningful and useful results.

For this study, the qualitative data were analyzed after transcribing all interviews and coding them in two phases: open-coding procedures were used in the data analysis to identify common themes, identifying, naming, categorizing, and describing phenomena (Glaser, 1992; Creswell and Miller, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and axial coding, which is the process of relating codes (categories and properties) to each other, via a combination of inductive and deductive thinking and was also used in the analysis of this data (Glaser, 1992; Creswell and Miller, 2000; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Two questions guided the researcher in this study:

(1) Did Black males dropped out of school because of non-academic factors?

(2) Are the students who dropped out currently unemployed?

Results

The results of this study have implications for reducing the number of Black males who drop out of school. Twenty-six percent of the participants dropped out of school because of academic factors such as “schoolwork being too hard and not liking the teacher.” The following key themes emerged from the data analysis: questionable home life, teacher dislike, and trying to do better. These students felt that teachers were “prejudiced” against them. “You know they [white teachers] don’t like black people.” They didn’t help us learn, and I hated school.” Others indicated the “schoolwork was “too hard to understand and that teachers “rushed” through the work. “ They [teachers] didn’t really teach us.” “Some didn’t give a damn.” We were on our little own.”

However, 73% of the Black males dropped out of school because of non-academic factors such as “medical needs, peer pressure, lost of focus, home problems, and hanging with friends.” “My mom is trying.”

“How can you study when you are tired and sick?” They [teachers] wanted their work done and we had other things on our little minds.” “ My brother and me got in a car accident and we couldn’t go to school.” “We got behind in work and couldn’t catch up”. “We both just dropped out of school.” “No one really cared about us.” “But, we were smart.” “The worked wasn’t hard; it was just that things happened.” “It was the school.” “ It was the school, teachers and them.” I had to deal with other things, those personal home things; school was easy, but they [teachers] didn’t want to hear about your home life.” “I needed a good counselor.”

Twenty-six percent of Black males who were interviewed reported that after graduating from high school, they had earned their GED; obtaining a GED was an “academic milestone” for me.” “Schools were too tight.” “The GED was best for me; it was quick and to the point.” “Doing the GED took me away from going to school every day and still put me on the right path.”

Thirty-three of the participants were unemployed. It was clear the regret for not graduating from high school. “Yes, I know, my high school diploma was needed.” “But, man, it was hard for me in school.” It is hard now without an education.” “I’m staying with my mom.” “But, I’m goona get my GED, got to.”

Less than one percent of those interviewed were on probation. Criminality was not a dominating theme in this study. “They [white people and friends] expect us to be jail birds.” “I did go and learned my lesson.” “It’s hard out here, but we trying.”

Based on this study, Black males did not overwhelmingly dropout of school because of academic reasons. This study supports the assumption that academics may not be the prevailing factor that thwarts Black males from graduating from high school. On the other hand, a convincing notation may be that Black males need an inundation of social, cultural, and mental

health services in schools that will positively impact academic performance. School counselors/psychologists, social workers, mental health personnel, other community publics may help in graduating more Black males. There may be more to educating Black males, than, the academic content.

Discussion

Fifteen Black males who dropped out of school participated in this study, which limits the scope and transferability of this research. However, studies as this should be on the precipice in furthering understanding why Black males drop out of school, which may not be due entirely to academics. This study has great implications and significance for educating Black males. Two questions guided the researcher in this study:

- (1) Did Black males dropped out of school because of non-academic factors?
- (2) Are the students who dropped out currently unemployed?

Community groups, faith-based instructions, and children advocates must rally around and develop non-academic programs (social and/or cultural) that will prepare Black males for successfully graduating from high school. Based on the results, 73% of those interviewed dropped out school because of non-academic factors. However, social issues such as peer pressure, lost of focus, medical needs, and wanting to work presented as salient factors that seemingly prevented Black males from graduating from high school (Bell, 2010a; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Whitting, 2009). Schools may need to concentrate on beefing-up their student services departments such as hiring more social workers, school counselors, and school psychologist to address the whole child; in addition, increased alliance with mental health agencies might also prove significant for graduating more Black males.

For so many Black males, the academic content may not be the issue, but rather a concoction of comprehensive programs that address the social and cultural needs of this population. Suggestions for future research include studying non-academics factors that prevent Black males from high school graduation and how those factors are more debilitating than the academic content (Bell, 2009). However, Bell (2009) concluded in this research that non-academics factors such as self-esteem may not be linked to increase student performance. To maximize the needs of the whole child, it is imperative that the community implement social, cultural, spiritual, and health programs that will keep Black males in school and graduating. Believe me, it is more to educating Black males, than academics!

Conclusion

There presents a multitude of reasons for Blacks to not graduate from high school such as peer pressure or just not being focused on schooling (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Bell, 2010; Anthony, Krissonis, and Herrington, 2007; National Research Council, 2001). Schools have not closed, the economy has not collapsed, or the Stock Market shattered because of the sobering graduation data for assertion that graduating Black males is a community mandate.

Schools and especially the various publics must develop social and/or cultural wrap-around services for Black males. Black males are swamped with social and/or cultural issues that retard their academic potential and the resiliency to graduate from high school. Having rigorous academic standards and a relevant curriculum, without building strong social and/or cultural opportunities will net the same results, deplorable graduating numbers for Black males. It is more than, just academics: social workers, nurses, school counselors, the community, and Black males are needed to aid in increasing the graduation of this population.

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