

An Exploratory Phenomenological Study of African American Male Pre-Service Teachers at a Historical Black University in the Mid-South

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory phenomenological study was conducted to ascertain which factors caused African American male pre-service teachers to persist at a HBCU in the Mid-South. The work is grounded in the conceptual framework called resiliency. Resiliency asks the question, “How do children, adolescents, and young people “make it” when they are exposed to or face major stress and adversity? The results of this study point to what are commonly called “protective factors” that exist in the lives of these young men. They are: (1) families/communities, (2) the individual, and (3) the school.

Introduction

Although many researchers advocate for the appropriateness and effectiveness of using cognitive variables such as SAT, ACT, or GPA as a means to determine the success of college students (Loeb, 1982; Lovette, 1982), others caution that such measures cannot be used to reliably predict college success for African-Americans (Farrell, 1989; Goldberg, 1969). Researchers have found that other factors including social, institutional, and economic conditions influence African American males' success in college (Hall, 1999; Hood, 1992). In addition, factors such as, personality, family background, income, past educational experiences, and religion play a role in the college successes of these individuals (Cross & Astin, 1981; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003).

There is also a body of literature that suggests the need to study the role of mentoring as a predictor of African American males' academic success (Jones, 2005; Sherman, Giles, &

Williams-Green, 1994). Nevertheless, there is dearth of research examining African American males' perceptions regarding the effects of mentoring on their academic success. Researchers have also found that mentoring is important in determining the success rates of African American males who are first generation college students or have low socioeconomic backgrounds. Apparently, this occurrence takes place because mentoring relationships reinforces the importance of education, fosters a feeling of hope, builds confidence, as well as acclimates students to college environments and expectations (Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). Likewise, Terrell and Hassell (1994) offer that many African American males view the role of the mentor as providing them with the awareness, the values, and culture of their new environment and providing them personal experiences on the customs, resources, and path for success.

Otto (1994) describes mentoring as deliberate relationship based mutual respect where the mentor usual holds a position of greater success or power. Mentoring can also be defined as an individual learning to navigate unknown environments (Daloz, 1986). However, Bell (1996) maintains that mentoring is simply one person helping another person to learn something that would have more difficult for them to learn otherwise. Over the past several decades, mentoring has become a highly accepted technique in helping those who need additional support. Part of this popularity can be attributed to a movement for adults who want to pass on their accumulated knowledge to youth (Miller, 2002).

Brown (1995) argues that the complexity of mentoring is increased when the relationship involves minority students, especially males. Nevertheless, a strong mentoring relationship empowers African American students and helps them build the self-confidence necessary to overcome discrimination and, many times, inadequate academic preparation at lower grade levels.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to ascertain, through qualitative methods, which factors attribute to the persistence of eight African American male pre-service teachers in a Historical Black University in the mid-south. More specifically, special attention was given to the role of the mentors.

Background

The conditions facing the African American community, in general, and African American males specifically are staggering. The conditions translate into the dearth of African American males attending college and graduating as teachers is more staggering. African Americans make up 12.8 % of the American population yet comprise approximately 40% of the chronically poor (Shinagawa & Jang, 1998). Twenty six percent of all African Americans live below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau,

1997). Their unemployment rate is double that of the general population (Shinagawa & Jang, 1998). Their arrest, conviction, and incarceration rate is 'off the chart' with 39.8% more black men being involved in the criminal system than are enrolled in an institution of higher learning (Arizona State University, 2004) and they lead the nation in homicides, both as perpetrators and victims (Skolnick & Currie, 1994). Noguera (1997) noted that the rate of homicide among African American men ages 15-24 is the highest for any group within the United States population. Even as babies, African American males have the highest probability of dying in the first year of life (Auerback, Krimgold & Lefkowitz, 2000; National Research Council, 1989). This group contract HIV and AIDS at a faster rate than all other populations (Auerback, Krimgold & Lefkowitz, 2000; Noguera, 1997) and their suicide rate is growing faster than all of segments of the population (National Research Council, 1989; Poussaint & Alexander, 2000). In fact, this is the only group in the United State that is experiencing a decline in life expectancy (Spivak, Prothrow-Stith, & Hausman, 1988).

In schools, African American males are more likely to be suspended and expelled from school (Meier, Steward, & England, 1989; Ferguson, 2000; Polite, 1993; Harry & Anderson, 1999), more likely to be placed in programs for the mentally retarded, learning disabled, or behavior disordered (Milofsky, 1974; Harry & Anderson, 1999) and absent from advance placement and honors courses (Oakes, 1985). Wright (1996) reported that fewer than 3% of African American males in a large urban/suburban school district were enrolled in advanced or honors courses. A study of the public school system in a large Midwestern U.S. city revealed that only 2% of the African American males achieved a GPA of at least a 3.0 on a 4.0 scale (Leake & Leake, 1992) and yet 75% were performing below average. It is estimated that 20 to 30% of all African American males drop out of high school before graduation (Noguera, 1997).

Reed (1998) maintains that African American males are victims of low expectations of teachers and school officials. Moreover, Slaughter-Defoe and Richards (1994) suggest that black males are treated differently than other students as early as kindergarten. Throughout elementary and middle school, black boys consistently received lower ratings by teachers for social behavior and academic expectations (Rong, 1996). Hooks (2004) asserts, "Even before black boys encounter a genocidal street culture, they have been assaulted by the cultural genocide taking place in early childhood educational institutions where they are simply not taught" (p. 39). Garibaldi (1992) found in a study of the New Orleans schools that 40% of the African American male students felt that teachers did not set high enough expectations for them and 60% wanted to be pushed harder by their teachers. He went further to find that African American males represented 42% of the school system, yet they accounted for 48% of the non-promotions, 65% of the suspensions, 80% of the expulsions, and 45% of the dropouts (Garibaldi, 1992).

Although African American males' college attendance increased during the 1990's, it still remains extremely low (Reisberg, 1999). Cuyjet (1997) observed, "a cursory look around most predominantly white campuses (unless one is standing in a location frequented by the football and basketball athletes) probably reveals the fact that black women attend college in proportionally larger numbers than black men" (p.5). In

1996, the African American male graduation rate for 300 of the nation's largest and top schools dropped from 35% to 33% (Arizona State University, 2004).

Who is teaching our children? The need for teachers in the United States is well documented in the literature. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley predicted in 1999 that this country would need approximately 2 million new teachers by 2009 (Riley, 1999). In addition, Gerald & Hussar (1998) predicted that the number of teachers needed by 2008 would be 2.2- 2.4 million. Due to the increase in student population, some estimate that 3.9 million teachers would be needed (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

Teachers in this country are still predominately white (Fristritzer, 1996) and female (Latham, Gitomer, & Ziomek, 1999). In fact, more than 90% of all teachers in the country are white (Fristritzer, 1996) and 75% are female (Latham, et al., 1999). African Americans, Latinos, Asian and Native Americans only make up 9-14% of all teachers in the country and this number is expected to drop to about 5% by 2009 (NCTAF, 2003; AACTE, 1999). In Kentucky for instance, only 4.1% of all teachers are of color. In fact, there are fewer teachers of color in Kentucky today than there were prior to the Brown decision in 1954 (KDE, 2004). Current statistics estimate that there are no minority teachers in 42% of all schools in the United States (NEA, 2004).

As to the gender of teachers—only about 24.9% of the nation's teachers are male (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003; Latham, et al., 1999). This number is steadily shrinking. In 1981, about 18% of all elementary school teachers were male and in 2004, that number was reduced in half to only 9% (NEA, 2004). Likewise, at the secondary level, the number of male teachers is shrinking, however less pronounced than in the elementary level. In 1981, 50% of all secondary teachers were male and in 2004, that number was 35%--a reduction of 15% (NEA, 2004).

Seeing minority males in the teaching profession is even scarcer. Currently, only 2.4% of all K-12 teachers are African-American males (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003) and most of these are at the secondary level. Many have postulated reasons for this dearth. Reglin (1994) attributes the lack of academic success to the shortage of positive African American male role models, the perceptions of societal racism and victimization, and existing African American male subculture.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to ascertain the phenomenological factors that influenced eight African American males to persevere and graduate from an NCATE accredited HBCU in the mid-south.

Methods

The study utilizes purposeful and snowball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Maxwell, 1998) which divides into several phases of data collection to focus the final design as it emerges. Participant observer is a frequent data collection approach used in qualitative inquiry. Based on the theory of symbolic interactionism, this approach

assumes individual actions result from participant's constant interpretation of their environment in relation to social situations and emphasizes the relevance of the investigators' beliefs, background, and culture within the context of the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 1990).

Data Collection

This study employs a networking approach and a critical framework to collect the study's naturalistic data, which includes conducting in-depth informal and semi-structured interviews, observations, and collecting and studying archival data such as student grade point averages, student teacher evaluations, reaction from students and other relevant documents. The case was chosen given (1) the dearth of African American teachers, especially male teachers of color; (2) the success of these African American male pre-service teachers; and (3) the personal and professional interests of the researchers. The focus of this study is to describe and understand factors that contributed to the success of these African American male teachers of color.

A total of eight African American male pre-service teachers in a Historical Black University in the mid-south were included in this study. The principal source of data for this study will be generated by semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviewing involves direct interaction between the researcher and a respondent or group. In addition, other sources of information include participant observations and archival data. Validity of the research is enhanced by triangulation of multiple data sources. In addition, interim analysis throughout the data collection phase will also be used to enhance the validity of the findings.

Qualitative researchers within the critical paradigm present findings from field notes, interview transcripts, or historical documents in order to give detailed accounts called descriptive narratives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2000). Researchers use descriptive narratives to highlight participant meanings. Contrary to analyses used in traditional, experimental research designs, descriptive narratives serve to hold the readers' interest, which allows the researcher to offer evidence to clarify the basis of the researcher's findings and assertions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Data Analysis

Qualitative case studies produce data in the form of field notes, reflections, tape recordings, impressions, and transcribed interviews. To analyze the data effectively, the researcher uses inductive logic to codify this data into themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Glesne, 1998; Hamilton, 2003; Patton, 1990). To aid in the codification this study uses content analysis for the preliminary data coding. Inductive logic is used to identify

relationships between the major identified themes. These relationships are used to develop a descriptive narrative composed of case study vignettes to offer a grounded theoretical explanation of the factors that influenced eight African American males to persevere and graduate from an NCATE accredited HBCU in the mid-south.

The study also uses grounded theory methods involving the systematic analysis of data derived from field notes, documents, and interviews continually coded and compared to reveal a reciprocal association with the phenomena under investigation. This approach provides for an intrinsic connection between the data and theory to come into view (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Consequently, the inferences that emerge are “grounded” in the data.

Results

The results of this study supported the previous set of work commonly called resiliency (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Benard, 1991; Garmezy, 1991; Linqanti, 1992). It asked the question, “How do children, adolescents, and young people ‘make it’ when they are exposed to or face major stress and adversity?” Linqanti (1992) defined resiliency as the construct used to describe children who, though exposed to the significant challenges in their lives, do not succumb to school failure, substance abuse, and juvenile delinquency. The results from the resiliency studies point to a set of factors that are commonly called “protective factors” that exist in families/communities, school, and individual. Bernard (1991), Masten (1994), and Masten, et al. (1990) identified a crucial set of protective factors for human development. The most important factor was a relationship with a competent, caring, supportive, pro-social adult. Second, consistently clear, high expectations communicated to the student; and three, ample opportunities to participate in and contribute meaningfully to one’s social environment.

Findings

The findings of this study closely parallel the findings of the resiliency studies. After the interviews were transcribed and coded, the researchers looked for trends in the data. The major findings fall into three areas: Family and community factors, individual factors, and school factors.

Family and Community Factors

Influence of Parents

Most of the participants talked about the role their parents played in their development. Only 25% of our participants were from traditional families. Single moms, moms and step dads, aunt and uncles, or grandparents were raising 75% of the subjects. Even though they were from non-traditional families, the participants acknowledged that without their parents they probably would not have made it. One young man described the influence of family this way: “My family played a very, very, very, important role in me graduating from college. Although my mother and father were divorced and I wish I had a better relationship with my father, without my family I feel that I would have been alone. Without the family piece there would be a big void, something missing right there [student touched his heart].” Listen to another student who said, “My mom and step dad were there for me. I never knew my real father, the real anchor in my life and probably why I am here today was my grandmother. Nobody in my family had been to college—they didn’t know how to fill out a college application, so I filled it out and got my parents tax information and enrolled in college. Never once did they say, ‘you can’t go to college.’ They just encouraged me.

One young man while middle school began to hang with the wrong crowd told how his parents handled it. “They moved me away from my neighborhood and the gangs and into a parochial school. I knew they couldn’t afford it, but they did it because they loved me. How could I let them down? I had to be successful!”

These young men almost unanimously said, “Nobody ever checked on me or my school work, nor did they ask me, ‘how are you doing in school’ or anything like that since kindergarten.” The tone of their voices even suggested they would have preferred closer monitoring. One young man said, “The family piece is that one thing that is missing in my environment. The family structure was dismantled and I had to find family somewhere.”

Influence of Siblings

Many of our subjects said they had to succeed because of younger brothers or sisters. Listen to one who said, “I couldn’t quit school because of my little brother. He is just like me, so I knew if I went to college and quit, he would not go to college at all. I had to be a role model for him.” One young man used his older brother’s misfortunes—extended credit card bills, wild-riotous living, unpaid student loans—to guide his behavior in college. “I knew that I didn’t want to make the same mistakes that my brother had made. So when I graduate, I won’t owe a penny to anybody!”

Individual Factors

Personal Drive to Succeed

All of these young men had a personal drive to succeed. Only one of the participants had a GPA above 3.0 in high school. Most of them barely made it out of high school. One participant noted, "I made better grades in college than I did in high school." One young man stated, "My basketball and football coach changed grades for me so I would be eligible to play sports. I was an athlete—"a star dog" and frankly, I never had to go to class to get the grades." Another young man said, "No one ever sat with me to discuss life at the next level. I just knew that I had to get out of that environment. The military was not a favorable option. I didn't want to sell drugs or sling hamburgers for the rest of my life, work a boring 8-5, so I chose college. Luckily, a college would accept me." One young man said, "I had to get out of the drug ridden, gang infested neighborhood where I lived. I knew there was a better place and I wanted to experience it. So anytime an assignment was due, professors weren't cutting me any slack, I knew that this was necessary for a better life." Another young man said, "I never quit anything in my life. If you quit, people will look at you like you're dumb. I don't want people to look at me that way." Yet another acknowledged, "I don't want to make the same mistakes I made in high. So when I go to class, I don't talk or goof around. In high school, that got me nothing."

One of the participants who had sold drugs and was, at least peripherally involved in gangs, stated his motivation to succeed this way, "I could drop out of school and easily make three times more than teachers are making. I can do that right now and right here. You have to want better for your life and no body can make you do it, they can't motivate you, you have to want to do it. I looked at the people around me and I say 'yeah they make money', but I don't always have to look over my shoulder. I don't want to have the money like that. I want to make legal money. I don't need a lot of money to be happy. I never really had money and people say \$30,000 (starting teacher's salary) is not a lot of money. I have never touched \$30,000 in my whole life and I'm about to make that in one year. You have to want to do it."

Influence of Faith and/or Religion

For all of our participants, religion or faith played a significant role in their success. "I have always had a strong religious faith. Although, I don't express it openly or worship publicly, I still have this abiding faith," said one participant. Others were open with their pronouncement of their faith. One young man attributed his success, "...first and foremost to my being a Christian and I attribute the majority of my success to the Word of God and getting into the Word of God. This mind change was very critical in me changing the way I thought about things, including school being more than girls and basketball." He even quoted Einstein's definition of insanity, "Doing the same things and

expecting different results.” He went further to say, “I knew I had to change my ways and the Word of God provided that.”

Although the majority of the participants were Christian, there was a Muslim and a Rastafarian. All stated the importance of faith. Almost in a unified voice they would say, “When things get tough, I pray. I pray before every test and God never fails me.” Others used meditation, Biblical studies, and inspirational readings to encourage themselves. They also stated that it was their responsibility not to “let God down” and therefore they had to try their hardest and give only their best.

School Factors

Of the schools factors that most appeared in the interviews of our participants, two were most prominent. They were: High expectations for performance, and personal relationship/environment of caring.

High Expectations for Performance for All Students

One student stated that coaches had changed his grades to be eligible for sports. When asked how it felt about that now, he stated, “I think they cheated me. I came to college a step behind and had to take remedial classes. I am not dumb; they just didn’t expect anything from me.”

One student accounts an incident when faculty held him to high standards. In a children’s literature class, the teacher said, “If you have a D at mid term you may as well drop the class.” I respectfully told the teacher, “I am not dumb and I am not going to drop the class. I am not ready to quit, I am ready to do the work; and work I did. I received a B in the class!”

Our teachers set the standards and you had to meet them. “I got C’s in other classes, but in education I only made A’s or B’s.” My professors gave me good advice. One professor told me to “swallow your pride, go apologize to your professor and ask how you could work together.” Another student told of a professor, who used unorthodox methods to encourage the participant to do his best in a fraternity essay contest. “The first time I brought my essay to Professor X, he tore it up and said this is not worthy of me to read. The second time, he tore it up and said this does not scream scholar. Aren’t you English major and a philosophy minor, he asked? This doesn’t show that you have an adequate mastery of the King’s English. Rewrite it! The third time I brought it to him, he said, ‘it’s getting there’. One more rewrite. To make a long story short, because of Professor X’s insistence to high standards, I won the fraternity’s Scholar of the Year Award and \$15,000 for graduate school!”

“I remember in Dr. Y’s class, I turned something in. Rather than failing me, he gave it back to me and told me to redo it and you will continue to redo it until we have an acceptable piece of work.” Another student talks about another professor who set the bar high for him. “I had been in college for six years and Professor Y called me to his office.

“When are you graduating Mr. Jones?”

“I don’t know,” I responded.

“Who’s your advisor? That’s not important, as of now I am!”

He evaluated my guide sheet and said,

“You will take 14 hours this summer, 21 hours in the fall and you’ll student teach in the fall. By the way, you will report to me weekly with your progress and do not let me have to come looking for you. Needless to say, I did that; I graduated, I’m finishing my third year of teaching, and next year I’ll have my masters in educational leadership.”

The participants in the study also said that teachers have to model appropriate professional behavior for you. “When I look around and see how my professors dress—mighty professional—I understand that that is the expectation for me. Every day when I go to school, I dress us like Dr. X and Dr. Y.” They would always tell us, “You can’t have a ‘dress down’ day. You are always auditioning for a job. Dress, look, and act the part.”

An example was given of Ms. Z. “She did a good job of modeling. When she opens a lesson, she first reviews what we learned from the previous lesson, tell you what we are going to learn and then at the end, she reviews what we learned. As I think back on it, all of my education professors modeled for us students.”

“I hated Dr. B. at first, but boy was he a role model. He would tell us, even if you are having a bad day, your students may not be having a bad day, so you have to carry yourself in a professional manner, smile, and teach the kids. Don’t short change the students’ education because you are having a bad day. You must carry yourself in a professional manner at all times.”

Build Personal Relationships With Students/Environment of Caring

The old adage is true: students don’t care how much you know until they know much you care. According to the participants in this study, there are two types of professors. First, there are those who are unapproachable. They build the walls between themselves and students and “never meet the students where they are.” They have rigid requirements which may or may not have any relevance to student learning. According to at least one student, “There are some teachers who are cold-hearted individuals, one strike and you are out. As soon as you make one mistake there was not a second attempt at correcting your mistake. You have to be flawless, and I’m learning that we are not. Most African American males rationalize it this way: Why try? As soon as I make a mistake, I’m out.”

One participant appreciated the relationships that he developed with his mentors. “Our relationship was more like the atmosphere you find in a family. It was a caring and

loving environment where you wanted to strive, you wanted to learn, you wanted to satisfy and make your professors proud of you.” One said, “Not only was it a family-type environment, they won’t let you fail. They won’t give you a grade, you’ll have to work for it, but they will work with you.”

Another responded, “Professor X is like my big brother, and Professor Y is like my uncle. When I can’t get to my dad, I can always go to Professor X or Professor Y and I can talk to them about anything.”

The participants in this study identified more with the School of Education than the University because, “You showed us love!” In this litigious environment of school, many professionals are ‘gun shy’ is using the words caring and love. But this phenomenon is most important to encourage African American males into the teaching profession. They reminded the researchers of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, in that all people want to be loved and appreciated. One student gave this account of Professor H. “When I was moving into my apartment, Professor H. called me and said, ‘I’ve got a bed, dresser, and some other things that you might be able to use in your apartment.’ Now I don’t feel indebted to her, but for a professor to believe that much in me, I must achieve and succeed. This one incident did so much for me—just the love factor—feeling appreciated and valued reminds me of the story of the eaglet and the chicken. There was an eaglet walking around with the chickens because the egg had fallen from the eagle’s nest and all of his life he thought that he was a chicken. One day, an eagle was flying by and saw the little eaglet who thought he was a chicken. He swooped down, picked him up and told him he was an eagle and you are supposed to be flying high. He then took him to the water’s edge so the eaglet could see himself. From that point on, the eaglet started to fly high and began soaring in life. Well that’s what my professors did for me. They started to tell me, you are an eagle, you are a 4.0 student, you are to be successful, you are the best teacher in the world and because of the love they showed for me, I am now soaring.”

Another student recalled that a professor, on the first day of class remarked, “In this class I see Ph.D.s, superintendents, principals, college professors, and national teachers of the year. I had never thought about it until I saw African American deans, superintendents, principals, and teachers and I suddenly realized that I could do the same.”

Another student recounted a story where a professor went beyond the call of duty to help him. “I didn’t have enough to pay my tuition, when Professor A said, ‘I’ll go with you to the bank and co-sign a loan for you.’ If that’s not love, what is?”

Several of the students said, “My professors modeled for me what a teacher is supposed to do. They set standards and would not take ANY excuses for not reaching them.” This was further echoed by another student who said, “We once looked at the standards as barriers that one had to surmount before becoming a teacher. In fact, many of these standards keep African American males out of the teacher education program. For instance, in a real sense my ACT scores, my high school grades, and my behavior in high school would have been barriers for becoming a teacher. Many of us ‘lollygagged’ in high school and were not focused on academics and we wandered aimlessly through those high school days, not knowing what profound impact it would have on our future. However, at this college, you didn’t base my future on my past. You gave me a fresh

opportunity to prove myself by meeting the standards. Otherwise, I would have been knocked out of the box right from the beginning.” Although, several would call this lowering the standards, one student corrected this perception. “It can’t be lowering the standards, when all who graduate have to meet these high standards. I think the proof is in the pudding—the number of graduates has doubled in the past four years, there is an *esprit de corps*, and the ‘word on the street’ is: if you need help go to the School of Education—they will help you even though you’re not an education major.”

Another area important to these successful African American male teachers was the time that they spent with male mentors. It’s interesting that race did not make a difference to them. These young men were appreciative for the time they could spend with a professional male role model. Listen to one who said, “I remember many, many times that I would come into a professor’s office and before you knew it, two hours had passed. I realize that you all are busy—work out the ‘wazoo’, but you would always make time for us. In many cases, you stayed after work when you could be spending that time with your family. I remember the conversations about history, the profession, and life in general. The conversations were interesting and intriguing to us, but you were investing time in us—and for that we are grateful.” Another student echoed these feelings when asked about faculty. “In some departments faculty don’t even talk to students and students don’t talk to them or even approach them. In education, the professors know your name, know what makes you tick, they have your cell phone numbers, and you have theirs. For education professors, their business is education. This relationship makes students want to perform. ‘Students will live up to or down to your expectations’.”

Discussion

At this NCATE accredited HBCU in the mid south, two professors (one African American and one Caucasian) created a mentoring program called Protégés and Provocateurs. A Protégé is one under the patronage or tutelage of another. In other words, it is “a young person who receives help, guidance, training, and support from somebody who is older and has more experience or influence.” An agent provocateur, on the other hand, traditionally, is a person employed by the police or other law enforcement body to act undercover to entice or provoke another person to commit an illegal act. More generally, the term may refer to a person or group who provokes another to perform a wrong or rash action, the deliberate purpose being to incite wider conflict or harm. In this context, the provocateur is one who is hired by a college or university and his purpose is to entice or provoke students to perform academically, socially, and emotionally so that others can see them in a different, more positive light. These eight young men in this study were the products of that work and prodding. They confirmed as did Loeb (1982) and Lovette (1982) that factors other than SAT, ACT, and GPA were better predictors of African American male success. Family and community support, individual or intrinsic motivation, and male mentors were protective factors that caused

them to persist in their quest to become teachers. The role of positive, pro-social, professional men cannot be discounted.

The results of this qualitative study was to ascertain the phenomenological factors that influenced eight African American males to persevere and graduate from an NCATE accredited HBCU in the mid-south. Given the statistics on the plight of African American males in the country and given the barriers that impede the successful matriculation of all students in the teacher education, African American males, in particular, the reasons for their persistence could provide valuable insight for teacher educators. The results of this study closely parallel the work of Masten, et al., (1990), Benard (1991), Garmezy (1991) and Linqunti (1992) which states there are factors, called protective factors that are crucial for human development and success. Those factors discovered in this study are:

1. Family and community factors
 - a. Influence of parents
 - b. Influence of siblings
2. Individual factors
 - a. Personal drive to succeed
 - b. Influence of faith or religion
3. School Factors
 - a. High expectation for performance
 - b. Personal relationships with students/environment of caring

These factors interacted with each other and no attempt was made to ascertain which, if any, of these factors accounted most for the success of these pre-service teachers. Mentoring programs that target African American males must include these factors. Reglin (2005), as quoted in Cyrus-Parson (2007), a study of African American males at the high school level, called for the following to be in mentoring programs for African American males:

1. High but realistic expectations
2. Parent and family involvement
3. Parent centers
4. Emphasis on the whole child
5. Building self-esteem
6. Cooperative learning
7. Cross age and peer tutoring
8. Learning styles instruction
9. Prevention and assessment of chilly classroom environments
10. Integration of African American males in the classroom activities
11. African American role models

Concluding Remarks

This study underscored the notion that despite the abject conditions that many African American males face in the country and despite the current conditions and dearth of African American male teachers in America's schools, colleges or schools of education can create programs and conditions that will improve the number of African American males in the teaching profession. This article showcases the work done by a program called Protégés and Provocateurs at a small HBCU in the mid-south. Replication of this model and further research is suggested to triangulate and institutionalize these results.

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