



The National Board for Certified Counselors

## **Innovations in Counseling: Working with Minority Populations- Part 1 Session 6: Working with African-American Male Students in Schools**

### **Webinar Follow-up Question and Answer Session with Mark Eades**

#### **Question from Dr. Beverly**

Are you familiar with the training DVD "Angry Black Males: The Misunderstood Population?"

#### **Answer from Presenter**

I have heard of this training video, but have not had the chance to view it yet. Thank you for bringing it to my attention, the title makes it sound like something I would be very interested in.

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#### **Question from Crisanne Blackie**

How do these experiences for African American males impact their transition to college?

#### **Answer from Presenter**

Most importantly, simply going to college can be a struggle for African American males as a group because of difficulties experienced in the school system. For example, when students are tracked into lower level classes or career track classes, then going to college becomes far more difficult than students who have taken advanced classes. Considering that African American male students are disproportionately placed into special education and low level classes, this means that going to college is far more difficult for this group. This also creates a dynamic where many colleges have a very low percentage of African American male students. This can result in a university being unaware of the needs of a portion of their population due to their low representation on campus. There is quite a bit of literature on this subject and I would encourage you to read more about it if this is an area that interests you.

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#### **Question from Lisa Boer**

Have you read about Ross Greene's Collaborative Problem Solving as this relates to identifying problems to solve rather than identifying the behaviors that are typically identified? This method may decrease the "who" the child is and choose the "what can we do to help."

#### **Answer from Presenter**

While I haven't read this book specifically, I have heard about the premise of identifying problems rather than behaviors. I completely agree with the idea that behaviors are a product, and to correct behavior it is imperative to understand what is perpetuating them.

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#### **Question from Anita Brown**

Do you have exercises that help clients identify strengths?

#### **Answer from Presenter**



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Most of my exercises are centered around elementary aged students, as this is the population that I have the most experience with. One exercise I do is to have a small group of students read a story together and then identify how the character(s) in the story did things well and their inner strengths. I then turn the focus on the group members and ask them to identify how each other use their strengths to do things well in school. I've found that drawing in a group of students is very helpful in identifying strengths for students of all ages.

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### **Question from Ashley Brown**

As a counselor working with a student of a different race, do you address your differences in terms of race, background, and experiences at the beginning of the counseling relationship? What is your method of addressing these differences?

### **Answer from Presenter**

As a counselor who is naturally drawn towards process, I find that voicing my own experiences and thoughts in session as an essential part of therapy. When students tell me about their homelife which is very different from mine, I think it is necessary to say something like "that's so different from what it was like for me growing up" and then to have a conversation about our different experiences. Sometimes, when it is clear that a student is uncomfortable in session with me, saying something like "you know, some students find it's kind of difficult to come in here and talk to someone who seems really different from them. What do you think about that?" sometimes can spark conversation. In any case, being open to talking about differences is an essential part of therapy with counselors who work with students from different backgrounds.

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### **Question from Linda Carrothers-Vaughn**

Do you think this is a key factor in the achievement gap between African American males and White males?

### **Answer from Presenter**

While there are many factors that contribute to the "achievement gap" between African American male students as a group and students of other backgrounds, certainly practices that are in place in many schools and school systems are a factor. There is a huge need to further understand how systems in schools affect minority male students and what we can do as counselors to correct them.

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### **Question from Ida Duplechin**

Have you noticed that a teacher who creates an "authentic relationship" w/students based on similar experiences and explain classroom rules basis of order and egalitarian principles provides everyone the opportunity to succeed?

### **Answer from Presenter**

Yes, I have found that teachers who create authentic relationships with students tend to have better classroom environments. I also have seen that teachers who explain their rules and why they are in place have an easier time enforcing them in class. For example, a teacher at a former school of mine wanted students to write down their questions on a piece of paper if they didn't understand what was being taught. The teacher explained to students that she had a hard time picking back up a thought if she was interrupted, and it is easier for her to



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answer questions after she has reached a natural stopping point in a lesson. After a few weeks and some gentle reminders to students, this practice became a classroom norm and students seemed to accept their teacher's preference for class. It has been my own experience as well that students respect teachers and staff who can be authentic in the classroom.

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### **Questions from Joyce Dallas**

Are you familiar with the Components of Educational Equity? Are you familiar with the concept of resisting oppression? If so, what role does it play in educating African American/Black students?

### **Answer from Presenter**

I am just familiar enough with the concepts of Educational Equity and resisting oppression to know that I don't know enough to comment on them in depth. In my limited knowledge, I think that a large component of both of these concepts is the idea of pulling in a community to assist students. I think that changing the school environment, and having the buy in of everyone in that environment that change is needed, is an essential component of improving how students learn and grow.

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### **Question from Marilyn Hornsby**

Do you find any difference in punishment with staff if there is some diversity of staff?

### **Answer from Presenter**

Great question. Having a diverse staff from a variety of backgrounds in any institution brings more shared ideas to the table. In terms of punishment, it may be that some teachers are better able to create classroom norms and interactions with students based on a similar background, and then these ideas can trickle out into the rest of the teaching community at the school. This has been my experience personally as a teacher, as I found that some teachers at my school were able to connect with students that I had difficulty connecting with, and having conversations with these teachers and doing classroom observations allowed me to modify my own classroom norms to be better suited to the students in my class.

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### **Question from Michael Hannon**

To what extent in your school counseling experience have you had the opportunity to help/consult with school personnel build rapport with African-American male students, which in my experience, is a really important variable in enhancing their school experience?

### **Answer from Presenter**

To this point, I have not had much direct experience helping faculty in schools build rapport with African American male students, but the small amount of experience I have had has proved to be quite rewarding for teachers and staff. Something that I've worked on with teachers in the past has been teaching them very basic helping skills (reflecting content, feeling, and asking open ended questions) to help connect with students. Teachers seemed to find this information very helpful when connecting with students from backgrounds different from their own and they also found that behavior problems tended to decrease as well.

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**Question from Tracey Glenn**

What can be done to educate teachers on the proper ways to interact with students of other races, in specific African Americans?

**Answer from Presenter**

As counselors, we have the luxury of being exposed to trainings and readings on being multiculturally considerate that many teachers have not been exposed to. I've found that teaching basic helping skills and cultural awareness can go a long way in educating a teaching staff. Even creating trainings on the basic idea of different worldviews can be immensely helpful in creating a more positive school environment.

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**Question from Leon Johnson**

Why is it easier to punish or implement disciplinary action against Afro-American students in the public school systems than any other culture of students?

**Answer from Presenter**

There are also other groups of students that experience punishment more often in schools, so it would be unfair to say that African American male students are the only group that experience this outcome; but it is also true that African American male students as a group are at-risk of being cited for behavior issues far more often than White female student (as just one example). There are many theories as to why this is true, as some researchers cite negative media images and negative stereotypic characterizations by teachers and staff as the cause of the problem. Further understanding on the subject is definitely needed and interventions to reverse this negative effect are also paramount.

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**Question from Carol Lee**

Do you feel that the teachers maybe setting up the AA males for failure?

**Answer from Presenter**

This is a tricky question, as I don't personally think that most teachers would intentionally want minority students to do poorly in school, and yet research consistently shows that African American male students as a group are experiencing poorer school outcomes compared to students of other backgrounds. This indicates that there are systems in place to promote students of some backgrounds and make it more difficult for students of other backgrounds to experience similar success. It is by uncovering and drawing attention to these systems that schools can begin to become a more positive environment for African American male students.

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**Question from Joanika LeBlanc**

Do you think that the attention is drawn to African American male students is due to racism?

**Answer from Presenter**

I think that inherent racist attitudes continue to exist in America and certainly in American schools, but even more so than over racist attitudes are systemic inequalities that continue to exist and disproportionately affect some groups more than others. Blatant and overt racist comments and attitudes are certainly damaging, but can



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also be identified and corrected. A far greater issue, in my own humble opinion, is subtle practices in schools that appear to be equitable for all students, but school data show produce unequal results. There is a huge need not only to further identify these damaging processes, but also how to educate school staff and the general public of how they operate and what we can do to correct them.

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## **Question from Candace Lair**

Why do you feel that teachers are more likely to punish African American males?

## **Answer from Presenter**

There are many theories as to why African American male students are more likely to be cited for behavior issues. One of which is that there is a stereotype that is in place in many educators' minds that African American male students are educationally inept and are dangerous. This primes a person to look for these behaviors, and when they emerge, it provides "evidence" for the original preconceived notion. This then perpetuates a cycle of teachers looking for negative behaviors, being more likely to find them because they are looking for them, and punishing students at a higher rate. I'm reminded an article that was published some time ago (I wish I could remember the citation, but it's skipping my mind at the moment) where some teachers were told that their students were "rising stars" in their schools and other teachers were given students of similar ability level, but were not told anything. The "rising star" students were given higher marks by their teachers and were identified as being advanced in intelligence level compared to the other group. This just goes to show the power that a thought or preconceived notion can have on students.

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## **Question from Meagan Jolliffe Sergent**

What approach will be effective with African American Male student-athletes (primarily football athletes) who are not playing in their first semester/year at college? Especially if they were the 'star' on their high school team? How can we encourage them to stay if they aren't playing?

## **Answer from Presenter**

Working with athletes is an area that I am not very familiar with, but I can imagine that coming to college and being exposed to a much higher level of talent must be jarring for some students. I would imagine that focusing on a student's overall goal for being in college would be an area that would need to be talked about. Does the student expect to become a professional athlete? Are they using their time as a college player as a means to get an education? Perhaps further research into counseling athletes would be helpful with what you are talking about here.

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## **Question from Kelly Locke**

Does the region of the country determine cultural biases towards a minority group? Meaning if a Hispanic population is higher in a region do you see these behaviors towards them?

## **Answer from Presenter**



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There is some research to suggest that region of the country can have an effect on how school staff react to students from a minority culture. While I am familiar with some research on this topic, I haven't done enough to give a thorough response; but I'll definitely look further into it. Thank you for the question.

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### **Question from Jayne Miller**

Have you read any of Ruby Payne's materials and if so what do you think of her take on the issue of relationships with minority students?

### **Answer from Presenter**

Unfortunately, I have not read any works by Ruby Payne, but you have peaked my interest. I think I may have to pick up a few of her works.

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### **Question from Rachael O'Marah**

What alternatives do you suggest rather than being put out of class?

### **Answer from Presenter**

Personally, I've found that taking a student out of their current environment and placing them in a different one is often enough to halt a disruptive behavior. For example, having a student sit for a few minutes in another math class takes them out of their current environment while placing them in another environment where they can still learn about math if they so choose. I've also seen teachers use strategic desk arrangements so that they can ask a student to move to a different part of the room as a form of punishment, which still allows the student to engage with the lesson. As a bit of an "out of the box" example, one teacher at my former school would have a chair in the hallway and if students were punished they were asked to sit outside. She would make sure, though, to keep the door open so students can still see and hear the lesson. There are many creative alternatives that can be implemented in school that do not have the unwanted effects of out of school suspension.

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### **Question from Merciana Oliver**

In forming psychoeducational and process groups, especially at the high school level, what is the success rate of getting the students with a history of punishment and repeated issues, to actually attend the groups?

### **Answer from Presenter**

I think the way a group is formed has a large impact on if it will be successful. Creating a group and telling students that they are in the group because of poor behavior or low grades may have lower buy in, because it can feel like another form of punishment. Creating a group with the intention that you are interested in the students' perspectives about school has a very different tone. In my own experience, making this difference well known in the initial meeting is paramount. If you'd like further help or a reference book on creating groups, "culturally considerate counseling" by K. Anderson is a great resource.

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### **Question from Sonia Reso**



Have you noticed African-American males responding differently to male counselors than to female counselors? Is there any advice specific to how female counselors should approach this population for the highest chance of success?

Answer from Presenter

I think that a key to connecting with students from cultures different from yours is to accept that both of you come from different backgrounds, but that you have a genuine interest and care for the student in front of you. While it may be easier for male counselors to have an immediate connection with other male students based on similar gender backgrounds, there is no substitute for a counselor who can accept and appreciate a student for who they are and the troubles they are experiencing.

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**Question from Wendy Sabin**

Is this phenomenon constant over all socioeconomic groups?

Answer from Presenter

Research indicates that students from lower SES groups can experience added discrimination in school, as teachers and staff can have lower expectations about a student's ability because of their economic background. This is especially important to take into account, since African American students are more likely to come from an economically disadvantaged background compared to White students. This can create a complicated effect in schools, where teachers assume that by being African American, a student is also economically disadvantaged, and associate negative characteristics to the student from both groups. This is why it is vitally important to create strong staff-student relationships in schools so that students can be appreciated for being an individual, with strengths and weaknesses based on who they are and not the groups they appear to belong to.

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**Question from Joseph Schap**

How are these data affected when schools are majority African American or nearly exclusively African American?

Answer from Presenter

Research seems to indicate that schools with high populations of minority and African American students tend to be situated in low-SES settings, which results in schools that are often lacking in basic teaching materials (e.g. books) and do not offer a wide variety of elective or AP classes due to insufficient funds. In addition, high teacher turnover and under-qualified teachers are also an issue that schools with high-minority student populations often face. This can create a situation where students who attend high minority schools can be seen as attending the "bad" school in the district or county, and may be stereotyped as incapable by the school they attend.

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**Question from Stephanie Turner**

How does this punishment cycle affect African American self-esteem?

Answer from Presenter



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As you can imagine, being caught in a punishment cycle can have a disastrous effect on a student's self-esteem. This is why it is imperative to find a student's strengths and highlight them during counseling to keep a student connected and engaged in school.

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### **Question from Robin Wardwell Wood**

You said that after a student is removed from class for discipline that when they return they "all of a sudden find themselves behind." However in my experience they are typically behind or discouraged and that is part of the discipline cycle-.can you speak to this issue?

### **Answer from Presenter**

I completely agree with your statement. Not only is it difficult to catch up on academic material when a student is removed from class, the negative emotions involved with struggling to catch up with classmates are also a limiting factor. In my own personal experience, I've seen students who have fallen behind once suspended from school who then come back to class and feel frustrated by their lack of understanding the subject, discouraged by their teachers and classmates, and many times embarrassed that they are not on the same plane as others in class. I think you've hit the nail on the head by bringing up the important role that emotions play in the discipline cycle.

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### **Question from Ellen Weaver Paquette**

Any comments planned on chronic nonattendance?

### **Answer from Presenter**

Yes, in my webinar I give an example of how creating basic data collection techniques can help with understanding the motivations behind student non-attendance. Also, this is a subject that is especially important to understand further. When students chronically miss school, they are likely to fall behind the rest of the class and can struggle to catch up academically. This is an area that I am very interested in and plan to research more.

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### **Question from Jacqueline Yekpabo**

Many inner city schools administrators feel that in order to truly create change in the school environment amongst minority students, there needs to be a predominantly large population of staff that are minorities as well. Do you agree that minority staff members are more equipped to meet the needs of minority students?

### **Answer from Presenter**

This is a complicated area. While some research shows that African American male students feel more connected to school and that school can feel more welcoming to African American male students when African American male teachers are present, relying solely on African American male teachers to create a healthy school environment can't be the only solution. Having a diverse faculty is absolutely important, but it is also just as important to train all faculties on how to interact and engage students from minority backgrounds.

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## **Question from Leslie Gordon**

Is there any research available that addresses the bias against African American boys from African American teachers?

## **Answer from Presenter**

I'm unsure if there is much research on this subject, as most of the research on African American male teachers appears to be on the positive effect they can have on the school environment. I would be interested in learning more if there is a literature base on the subject.

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## **Question from Marilyn Dykman**

How about a peer mentor program?

## **Answer from Presenter**

Yes. Peer mentor programs can be very helpful as a means to connect students to schools. I've used mentoring programs in every school that I've counseled at and they've always worked to connect students to the school and create a safe place for students to voice their concerns.

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