

Increasing the Mathematical Proficiency of Underachieving African American Males: A Focus on Communication and Representation

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“High Leverage” Strategies

- Develop number sense.
- Develop a relational understanding of concepts.
- Express a deep belief in the capabilities of students.
- Enable students to use mathematics as a tool for examining issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, and social class (Sleeter, 1997; Tate, 1995).
- Create an environment where students are able to find and justify their solutions, question other students and communicate their responses to the same or different questions. A few ideas:
 - Use of words AND numbers AND pictures AND... (instructionally)
 - Develop student-friendly translations for the “Verbs of Doing Mathematics”
 - Research-based models for encouraging/improving the verbal discourse and written communication of underachieving African American males
 - Use of the strategy of “Play-Acting” to improve student understanding of mathematics problems
 - Appropriately uses of technology
- Develop partnerships with African American male students’ parents.

Adapted from:

Strutchens, M. (2000). Confronting beliefs and stereotypes that impede the mathematical empowerment of african american students. Changing the Faces of Mathematics: Perspectives on African Americans, NCTM.

Lessons learned from the experts with respect to teaching the African American male student:

1. As a rule of thumb, treat every Black male as you would treat your own son.
2. Set a tone for learning each day and remain consistent from day to day. Do not expect to accomplish anything without structure and discipline.
3. Learn to manage your classroom. Instead of taking time to correct inappropriate behaviors among Black males, too often teachers, Black and [Non-Black], will move for suspension and expulsion.
4. Know that it becomes impossible to discipline or teach the Black male unless the boy believes that you care.

5. Understand that African American males, from as early as second grade, are haunted by and have to overcome the negative portrayals of who they are.
6. Believe that African American males are perfectly capable of performing at high academic levels. The one thing that the Black male student does not need is teachers who accept the statement, "I can't do this."
7. Learn as much as possible about the community in which the Black male lives. To the extent possible, attempt to relate course content to the real work of Black males, but also assist them in their efforts to understand global issues.
8. Seek out ongoing career planning and in-service training with a clear focus on encouraging student set career goals.
9. Aid Black males in sorting through career options and help them to understand the importance of setting career objectives, specific achievement strategies, and a plan of action for fulfilling the course requirements needed to realize those goals. Students should review and adjust their goals and strategies annually under the direction of teachers and counselors.
10. Participate in a continuing education program. This program should provide the teacher with skills in multicultural learning, communication, culture, and social and learning styles, with an emphasis on African Americans.
11. Do not assume that every Black male is a trouble-maker.
12. Expect, regardless of your race, social class, background, or teacher preparation to struggle to find ways to establish meaningful relationship with African American male students. Your experiences influence how you see the world and cannot be dismissed, devalued, or ignored. Establishing a meaningful relationship does not mean an interpersonal "friendship" between you and the students. Rather, successful teachers let African American males know that they care.

Foster, M. and Peele, T. (1999) Teaching black males: lessons from the experts. *African American Males in School and Society*. Teachers College Press. Columbia University. New York (19).

