Using Culturally Sensitive Theories and Research to Meet the Academic Needs of Low-Income African American Children

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The economic and social barriers to the academic and social success of many African American children remain in place as the new millennium begins. These realities provide impetus for developing community-based partnership education programs designed to self-empower African American children for academic and social success under any socioeconomic conditions that exist in their lives. Progress toward effective program development, however, has been hindered by a dearth of culturally sensitive theories and research. The Research-Based Model Partnership Education Program (Model Program) is an effective, community-based, university–school–community partnership education program for self-empowering African American children for success. The formative and summative research of the Model Program is described in hopes of advancing theory and research for meeting the academic and social needs of low-income African American children.

African American children are the proxy for what ails American education in general. And so, as we fashion solutions which help African American children, we fashion solutions which help all children.

—Augustus F. Hawkins[1]

Two decades of progress in reducing educational disparities between African American children and European American children stalled and, by some indicators, reversed course in the 1990s (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 1997, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c). Low academic achievement and disproportionate high school dropout rates remain common problems among African American children, particularly those in low-income families (NCES, 2001a). The continued undereducation of African Americans will undermine broader school-reform efforts and ultimately place a heavy burden on society as a whole.

Despite repeated calls for and general agreement about the need for more research into the lives of children across ethnic groups (Clark, 1983; Comer, 1988; Dumas, Rollock, Prinz, Hops, & Blechman, 1999; Kerckhoff & Campbell, 1977; Marjoribanks, 1981; Ogbu, 1992), psychological literature continues to show troubling signs of apathy toward cultural issues (Graham, 1992; Nagayama

Hall, 2001; S. Sue, 1999). Most theories and interventions for children and adolescents are based on research with mostly European American, middle-class samples (see Dumas et al., 1999; Hammond & Yung, 1993; Rhodes & Jason, 1988). Such theory and research may not advance knowledge about the specific needs of children from other cultural backgrounds, such as African American children (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Dumas et al., 1999; Jenkins, 1989; Oyemade & Rosser, 1980; D. W. Sue & Sue, 1999).

A purpose of the present article is to describe a culturally sensitive theory- and research-driven intervention program called the Research-Based Model Partnership Education Program (Model Program) that has enhanced the academic achievement and adaptive behaviors of low-income African American children over the past decade (Tucker et al., 1995; Tucker, Herman, Reid, Keefer, & Vogel, 1999). A summary of the foundational and summative research for the Model Program and an overview of its intervention components are presented to foster the development of culturally sensitive theories and research, as well as other programs to meet the academic needs of low-income African American children.

[1] As quoted in Giddings (2001, p. 462). Hawkins is the founder of the National Council on Education of Black Children.

Carolyn M. Tucker

The Need to Promote Academic and Social Success Among African American Children

Abundant research indicates that African American children in general and socioeconomically disadvantaged African American children in particular are experiencing less academic and social success and more exposure to negative learning environments that cultivate behavior problems and violence than are their European American majority peers. Following are some examples of these research findings.

1. Proportionately, more African American students in general and more African American students from low-income families in particular drop out of school as compared with their European American counterparts. In 1999, 12.6% of all African Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 years were school dropouts; comparatively, only 7.3% of European Americans were school dropouts (NCES, 2001a). In 1995, for this same age group, the school drop-out rate was much higher for African American students in low-income families (20.1%) than for African American students in middle-income families (8.7%) and in high-income families (3.2%). Comparatively, the school dropout rate for European American students in low-income families (18.6%) was much higher than that for European American students in middle-income families (8.8%) and those in high-income families (2.6%; NCES, 1999). These data highlight the complex interplay between race and socioeconomic status (SES) and suggest that effective solutions to reduce school dropout rates require attention to both variables.

2. Academic proficiency in reading, mathematics, and science as measured at age 9 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress is lower for African American children than for European American children. These racial/ethnic differences persist through age 17 and have been stable for the past decade (NCES, 2001c). One striking example of the disparity is that in 1999, the average reading score for 17-year-old African Americans was similar to the average reading score of 13-year-old European Americans. Also, higher education institutions with high minority enrollment, as compared with institutions with low minority enrollment, were more likely to offer remedial reading, writing, and mathematics courses (NCES, 1999).

3. African American sophomores (51%), as compared with their European American counterparts (37%), are more likely to report that disruptions by other students interfered with their learning and that street gangs were present in their schools (25% and 13%, respectively). Additionally, in 1999, African American sophomores (9%), as compared with their European American counterparts (4%), were more likely to report that they feared being attacked or harmed at their school (NCES, 2001b).

4. In a survey of high school students conducted in 1999, a higher percentage of African American students (10%) than European American students (4%) reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property. A higher percentage of African American students (18.7%) than European American students (12.3%) also reported being in a physical fight on school property (NCES, 2001b).

In addition to these statistics documenting educational disparities for African American children, growing research evidence indicates that African American children are disadvantaged by peer and teacher biases in the classroom as well. Several studies, for instance, have indicated that teacher behaviors may disproportionately interfere with the academic engagement of African American children (Guerra, Attar, & Weissberg, 1997; Tucker, 1999; Wentzel, 1994). Although teacher support is positively related to student effort for both African American and European American adolescents, Wentzel (1994) found that African American students reported receiving significantly less support from their teachers than did their European American peers. Teachers also tended to interact less with and provide less contingent praise to low-income and ethnically diverse students (Guerra et al., 1997). Furthermore, compared with African American teachers, European American teachers were more apt to rate African American male students as more behaviorally deviant than European American male students and to be more hesitant and less structured in classroom interactions with African American students (Eaves, 1975). These findings are especially disconcerting in light of recent evidence indicating that teacher involvement has a strong, direct effect on the academic engagement of low-income African American students (Tucker, Zayco, et al., 2002).

Low teacher expectations may further disadvantage African American children. Whereas a recent study indicated that teacher expectations exert a powerful and direct influence on the academic achievement of low-income African American students (Gill & Reynolds, 2000), other research has suggested that teachers have low expectations

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of African American children (Baron, Tom, & Cooper, 1985; Garibaldi, 1992). For instance, in a survey of 500 teachers, Garibaldi (1992) found that nearly 60% of the teachers expected their African American students would not go to college; over two thirds of these participants were elementary school teachers, and more than half were African American. To empower African American children for academic success, at a minimum, parents, educators, and researchers must believe that these youth want to be and can be academically successful, no matter what they say or do to the contrary.

The Need for Culturally Sensitive Theories and Research

Much of the research on underachievement and academic failure among African American children and other non-majority children has been anchored in cultural deficit theories (Jencks, 1972; Moynihan, 1965; see Fainstein, 1995; Nagayama Hall, 2001). It is important that culturally sensitive theories provide the basis for interventions for African American children (Coll & Magnuson, 1999; Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990; Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990). Culturally sensitive theories are based on research with African American youth and families who are similar in values and SES to the African American youth and families to whom the theories are directed.

Efforts to develop culturally sensitive theories are impeded by the lack of research with African American children and families. Numerous researchers have identified the limits of existing applied research with ethnic minorities (Graham, 1992; Nagayama Hall, 2001; S. Sue, 1999). Several reviewers have documented the dearth of studies with content focused on ethnic minorities (as low as 1.3% of reviewed studies) despite the growing ethnic di-

versity of America (Graham, 1992; Iwamasa & Smith, 1996; Nagayama Hall, 2001; Santos de Barona, 1993). Perhaps most indicative of the indifference of researchers to the generalizability of their findings across different races is a recent review's finding that nearly 40% of articles published in key clinical, counseling, and school psychology journals between 1993 and 1997 failed to report the ethnicity of their participants (Case & Smith, 2000). This state of affairs persists despite the National Institutes of Health 1994 policy that mandates the inclusion of ethnic minority persons in federally funded research.

Although larger representation in research topics and participation is important, culturally sensitive research requires more than simply recruiting an ethnically diverse sample (Dumas et al., 1999; Nagayama Hall, 2001). Even research that includes ethnic minority persons or topics typically fails to include a culture-specific perspective. Culturally sensitive research requires that cultural issues be addressed at every stage of the research process, including conceptualization, design, implementation, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination (Dumas et al., 1999). Additionally, culturally sensitive research examines within-ethnic/racial-group differences rather than simply comparing outcomes or performances across ethnic/racial groups (i.e., comparative research). Most existing research that includes ethnic minorities is comparative (Coll, Akerman, & Cicchetti, 2000; Graham, 1992). For instance, in her review, Graham (1992) found that over 72% of articles that included African Americans were race-comparative studies.

Researchers who conduct comparative studies make implicit assumptions, consistent with etic or universalist perspectives, that there are "principles, aspects, or processes of human existence that transcend (socio)racial and cultural boundaries and, therefore, are applicable to all human beings" (Helms & Cook, 2000, p. 73). A corollary of this assumption is that theories and findings can be developed in one setting, with one population, then successfully transported to others. Etic perspectives may not simply dismiss the relevance of culture. Rather than advocating culture-specific research, though, etic proponents argue that existing theories and research can be made more culturally inclusive.

Grounded in etic assumptions, comparative research is problematic for several reasons. For one, many researchers have noted that without culture-specific measures and hypotheses, cultural differences are unlikely to emerge, and thus research is biased toward confirming a universalist perspective (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Lewis-Fernandez & Kleinman, 1994; Nagayama Hall, 2001). Simply statistically controlling context variables such as ethnicity and SES may mask meaningful group differences associated with culture (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Even more problematic, differences in performance between African American and European American students are often characterized as deficits that need correction (Oyemade & Rosser, 1980). Thus, some authors have labeled some research involving comparisons of ethnic minorities to European Americans as deficit model research (Oyemade & Rosser, 1980; D. W. Sue & Sue, 1999). Such research

assumes equal opportunities for different racial groups (Jenkins, 1989) and relies on decontextualized outcomes (Cole & Stewart, 2001). As such, results of deficit model research often reinforce perceptions or stereotypes of African American children as being less intellectually and socially capable and competent than their European American peers (see Cole & Stewart, 2001).

This is not to say that all comparative research is invidious. Studying the different experiences of individuals and groups may produce useful information, but such research must be undertaken with appropriate caution. Meaningful comparative research requires thoughtful reflection on the social implications of one's work and an awareness of the implicit and often irrelevant standards used. As Cole and Stewart (2001) noted, "If, in the interests of objectivity, we ignore the political implications of our work, we are certain to legitimate and reproduce the prejudices of the social contexts in which our research takes place" (p. 304). Their specific suggestions for making comparative research less discriminatory include (a) studying racial categories as lived experiences and social processes rather than as self-evident realities, (b) sampling a wide range of settings and experiences, (c) choosing appropriate control or comparison groups that have been living under "like environmental and cultural conditions," and (d) describing within-group differences (Cole & Stewart, 2001, p. 302).

The difference model research approach is an alternative to comparative or deficit model research (Oyemade & Rosser, 1980). Performance or lifestyle differences between majority and nonmajority groups are viewed not as pathological but rather as acceptable, even healthy, adaptations to contextual demands. This approach advocates recognizing cultural and other significant differences when investigating the academic, cognitive, and social behavior of groups that differ culturally or socioeconomically. It supports separately examining factors in the behavior and performance of African American youth and factors in the behavior and performance of European American youth. By focusing on African American children rather than on their similarities to or differences from their European American peers, researchers will be more likely to ask research questions that identify the particular needs of these children.

Because there are groups of African Americans who differ significantly in background, socioeconomic levels, lifestyles, values, and acculturation into the majority culture (Allen & Majidi-Ahi, 1989; Dillon, 1994), it is important to study these groups separately. All African American children are not the same, and thus no single intervention can be effective for all African American children. The diversity of African Americans must be considered in program development, program implementation, and policymaking (Resnicow, Soler, Braithwaite, Ahluwalia, & Butler, 2000).

In a recent article, Resnicow and colleagues (2000) described a useful framework for conceptualizing culturally sensitive research and program development that is consistent with the difference model. They distinguished between two dimensions of cultural sensitivity: surface structure and deep structure. Surface structure refers to the extent that materials and programs are tailored to observable characteristics of a target population. Surface structure is analogous to face validity in psychometrics. Deep structure focuses on the perceptions of different target populations that have been influenced by their unique sociopolitical histories in the United States. According to Resnicow et al., deep structure conveys salience and determines the impact of culturally sensitive efforts. Whereas empirical literature regarding risk factors, behavior patterns, and predictors of achievement can inform surface structure of culturally sensitive programs, culture-specific research with the target population is needed to fully understand the deep structure of such interventions.

Formative Culturally Sensitive Research

Given the dearth of research on the topic and the guidelines of the difference model research approach, our research team initiated several studies to identify the culture-specific needs of low-income African American children in our community. The overarching goal of this line of research was to inform interventions that could be used to enhance the academic success of the children we were hoping to assist. The specific variables investigated had been identified by previous research as important predictors of academic success for low-income African American children. The foundational research of the Model Program sought to specify the relationships among family context (including family support, economic risk, and family structure), parent behaviors (including punishment practices, grade expectations, and church attendance), child behaviors (adaptive or maladaptive), and academic performance. The children who participated in these formative studies by Carolyn M. Tucker and her research associates (see Tucker, 1999) were samples of 1st graders through 12th graders who were mostly from low-SES families. Over 90% of the children had below a 2.5 grade point average (GPA), a weakness in math and/or reading, mild behavior problems, and/or weaknesses in adaptive skills.

Although abundant evidence has suggested a relationship between parent behaviors and school success, little research has investigated the relationship between students' behavior and skills and academic achievement. In a study of 248 African American children and 382 European American children (second, fourth, and eighth graders) and their parents, Brady, Tucker, Harris, and Tribble (1992) investigated the relationship between adaptive skills and maladaptive behavior (measured by parent report on the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale; VABS) and academic achievement (i.e., GPA and Metropolitan Achievement Test scores of the participating children). As hypothesized, adaptive skills, including communication and daily living skills, significantly predicted academic achievement among the European American children. Surprisingly, though, only maladaptive behavior predicted achievement for the African American children ($r = -.29$). Specifically, the African American children's adaptive skills (communica-

tion, socialization, and daily living skills) were unrelated to their academic achievement; only their acting-out behaviors predicted how they were doing in school.

Given the indicated importance of maladaptive behavior in influencing the academic success of African American children in our community, we focused our next study on identifying predictors of maladaptive behavior. Dunn and Tucker (1993) administered the VABS and the Family Relationship Index to the primary caregivers of 107 African American children (1st–12th grades). Expressiveness, cohesion, and conflict in the family were examined as predictors of participating African American children's maladaptive behavior and adaptive skills (Dunn & Tucker, 1993). Contrary to previous research with European American samples (Bell & Bell, 1982; Garfinkle, 1982), parent-reported expressiveness and cohesion in the family were unrelated to either adaptive functioning or maladaptive behavior of African American children. Only family conflict predicted their maladaptive behavior.

Additionally, we explored the relationship between self-esteem and maladaptive behavior. Many authors have suggested that boosting African American children's self-esteem and increasing their knowledge of African American culture and history are needed interventions to help deter or neutralize the fear of racism or the actual negative impact of racism on these children (Hale-Benson, 1986; Lee, 1982). Lee (1982) asserted that tangible education gains by African American children would not occur without positive self-acceptance and self-esteem.

Our research did not support these views. In a study of 59 elementary and high school African American students living in a small southern city, Gaskin-Butler and Tucker (1995) found that global self-esteem of the male students was positively associated with maladaptive behavior and negatively associated with adaptive skills. In other words, high self-esteem was associated with frequent maladaptive behavior (e.g., hitting and fighting) and low levels of adaptive skills (e.g., communication skills). The reverse was found for African American female students. Furthermore, self-esteem was not a significant predictor of academic achievement for either the male or the female students (a finding corroborated by Jordan, 1981). Without also giving priority to facilitating academic learning and competence, the benefits of teaching racial pride and boosting self-esteem are likely short term, intangible, and deceptive (Frisby & Tucker, 1993).

Rather than self-esteem, perceived self-control appears to be the critical variable in predicting maladaptive behavior for African American children. This was supported by the results of a study in which African American children's math achievement motivation, self-control, and perceived social support from their primary caregiver were investigated as predictors of maladaptive behavior (Tucker, Vogel, et al., in press). Sixty-nine children and their primary caregivers completed the Social Support Scale for Children, the Self-Control Rating Scale, the Math Achievement Motivation Scale, and the Behavior Problems Checklist (BPC). Hierarchical regression revealed that self-control was the only significant predictor of maladaptive

behavior, accounting for 55% of the variance in children-reported and 50% of the variance in parent-reported scores on the BPC.

Self-Empowerment Theory: A Formative Culturally Sensitive Theory

On the basis of these findings and given the void of culturally sensitive theories regarding African American youth, Carolyn M. Tucker proposed the self-empowerment theory (SET) to guide research and interventions intended to reduce and prevent behavior problems and academic failure of African American youth. In this model, self-empowerment is defined as an internal sense of personal control or influence over desired outcomes in one's life. The rationale for SET is that most of the sociopolitical factors that hinder the academic achievement of African American students are intractable, at least within the school lifetimes of today's children. If one accepts the premise that racism and socioeconomic disparities will continue to impede the current generation of African American children regardless of reform efforts, then one is left with a single conclusion: African American students must be taught to achieve under whatever sociopolitical conditions exist. Such a conclusion does not negate the responsibility to address social injustice. It only recognizes that African American children need special skills to combat social inequalities until social justice is achieved.

SET postulates that behavior problems and academic failure, as well as prosocial behavior and academic success, are significantly influenced by levels of (a) self-motivation to achieve academic and social success, (b) perceived self-control over one's behavior and academic success, (c) self-reinforcement for engaging in social and academic success behaviors, (d) adaptive skills for life success, and (e) engagement in success behaviors. Thus, SET is very consistent with other theories of autonomous, self-regulated behavior (Bandura, 1986; Connell, 1991; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Kanfer, 1990; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1988). From these theories, SET borrows definitions of constructs (e.g., self-efficacy) and intervention strategies. What is unique about SET is that it postulates that self-empowerment of African American children is particularly indicated, given that many of these children and their families experience poverty, discrimination, and racism that impede goal attainment and foster a sense of powerlessness. It is reasonable that many African American children in these life situations think and believe that they cannot achieve academic and social success, and thus they fail to achieve them.

Additionally, community mobilization is an essential feature of SET. According to SET, intervention efforts must involve community-based partnership efforts and ideally should be based in the African American community. Partners include parents; teachers; schools; education policymakers at local, state, and national levels; community leaders; business leaders; the African American church; and African American children themselves. Thus, SET addresses criticisms that have been levied against self-

empowerment theories and interventions (e.g., overemphasizing individualism and competition; see Riger, 1993) by suggesting that self-empowerment strategies are most likely to be effective, enduring, and meaningful when they occur in the context of community partnerships. Consistent with SET's emphasis on community mobilization is the growing evidence supporting the use of culturally sensitive interventions (Botvin, 1996; see Dumas et al., 1999; Forehand & Kotchick, 1996; Hammond & Yung, 1991; Okwumabua, Wong, Duryea, Okwumabua, & Howell, 1999) and structured afterschool programs to positively affect African American youth (see Chipungu et al., 2000; Kahne et al., 2001).

The Research-Based Model Partnership Education Program: A Culturally Sensitive Intervention

The Model Program, in its 12th year of operation, is an example of a community-based effort to alter the educational outcomes of African American children that is grounded in culturally sensitive theory (i.e., SET) and research (i.e., the difference model). The Model Program is conducted in the education center annex of a church (Mt. Olive African Methodist Episcopal Church) that is located in the heart of a low-income African American community. There are no religious connections between the church and the Model Program. This church site was selected because it is convenient to the children and families that it serves and because it, like almost every church in an African American community, is viewed as a safe place for parents to bring their children. All of the children who participate in the Model Program are African Americans; however, there is much ethnic diversity among the Model Program staff.

The Model Program is free of charge for students and parents. It operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays for two hours each day after school. The Model Program serves approximately 55 parent-referred or school-referred children from 1st grade to 12th grade with low grades in math and/or reading and mild behavior problems and/or some adaptive skill weaknesses. The older children (7th–12th graders) attend the Model Program on Tuesdays, and the younger children (1st–6th graders) attend on Thursdays; thus, each child participates in the program only two hours per week.

Program Structure

The Model Program consists of the following components: (a) individualized academic tutoring and homework assistance; (b) training to teach adaptive skills and strategies for managing negative and positive emotions and for engaging in success behaviors (e.g., behaviors that display a positive attitude); (c) end-of-day sharing of positive feelings regarding what the children were observing, doing, or attempting to do well or right; (d) parent training; and (e) teacher training.

Individualized academic tutoring and homework assistance. Tutors provide the children in the Model Program with tutoring to assist with homework and to address academic weaknesses. The children's academic weaknesses and strengths are identified periodically by their regular schoolteachers and by the children themselves. The tutors are mostly undergraduate students from the nearby partner university; however, a few parents and community leaders serve as tutors. All tutors are trained to use a teaching/tutoring method called the step-by-step teaching/learning method.

The step-by-step teaching/learning method is based on Meichenbaum's (1977) cognitive modeling and self-instruction approach. This method involves (a) dividing the skill or behavior to be learned into steps, (b) having the teacher model the skill or behavior using the steps and saying each step aloud (i.e., cognitive modeling), (c) having the student perform the same skill or behavior (as modeled by the teacher) while the teacher instructs the student using the steps, (d) instructing the student to perform the skill or behavior while using the steps to instruct himself or herself aloud and then silently (i.e., covert self-guidance), (e) having the student memorize the steps and practice the skill or behavior using the steps covertly, and (f) having the student self-praise progress toward and attainment of the behavior or skill throughout the learning and practice processes. The use of self-praise in the last step is supported by the research of Edgar and Clement (1980), who showed that self-reinforcement (e.g., self-praise) was more effective than teacher-controlled reinforcement in facilitating the math achievement of African American male students.

Training in adaptive skills and skills to manage emotions and behaviors. Using a small-group training format and cognitive–behavioral approaches, program staff teach children adaptive skills (i.e., communication skills, socialization skills, and daily living skills) and strategies for managing negative and positive emotions and for engaging in success behaviors. The cognitive–behavioral approach used with the children in the Model Program in sum involves (a) teaching them the associations between thoughts (e.g., self-talk), feelings, and behaviors; (b) emphasizing that they and not others are in control of their behaviors; and (c) teaching them that they can change behaviors that get them into trouble or are embarrassing to them (e.g., voice trembling when speaking in class) by changing their self-talk and engaging in some specific alternative behaviors and behavior-management strategies (e.g., deep breathing to relax). The goals of this approach are to teach children specific positive self-initiated and reactive behaviors for academic, social, and life success.

Communication skills taught include skills for writing and speaking standard English. Socialization skills taught include skills for successfully resisting peer pressure, interviewing for a job, selecting successful friends, handling conflict, and introducing oneself to teachers and others. Among the daily living skills taught are skills for effectively managing one's time and money and for solving problems.

To manage their negative emotions, the children learn cognitive–behavioral strategies for constructively express-

ing anger, frustration, and other negative emotions; they are also taught how to constructively express positive emotions. A major emphasis is given to teaching the children the feedback formula, which involves the following steps: (a) Say the specific event that elicited the negative or positive emotion, (b) specify the feelings that arose in response to the event, (c) state the desired actions to decrease or increase the occurrence of the event, and (d) praise oneself for having expressed one's feelings calmly, clearly, and constructively.

The children also learn cognitive–behavioral strategies and techniques for engaging in success behaviors (e.g., asking questions about what is not understood). Additionally, these children learn assertion techniques, stress-management techniques, performance-anxiety-management strategies, health-promotion strategies, and self-esteem-enhancing techniques that foster academic, social, and life success.

Sharing of positive feelings. At the end of each Model Program day (i.e., at "sharing time"), tutors and all other Model Program staff publicly give students specific, individual, positive feedback regarding their effort, progress, and success in learning skills and behaviors for academic, social, and life success. The children are also given the empowering opportunity to give public positive feedback about the help they received or about the success behaviors they observed in their tutors and in other staff members. Additionally, program staff encourage children to publicly identify and self-praise their self-perceived academic and skills development efforts, progress, and success. Because some African American children label engaging in success behaviors "acting White" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Tucker, Herman, Pedersen, Vogel, & Reinke, 2000), program staff remind children that engaging in success behaviors is "acting African American" and is "cool" to encourage them to participate in sharing time. The children are also praised for their participation. The goal of sharing time is to boost the children's self-confidence, reinforce their use of self-praise, and promote academic engagement by pairing learning experiences and environments with positive feelings about oneself.

Parent training. Parent training occurs through monthly parent workshops and through practica in which the parents visit the Model Program to observe and learn the methods and strategies used there to promote their children's academic and social success. In the workshops and the practica, parents learn how to teach these methods and strategies to their children and to use these methods and strategies to self-empower themselves for marital, family, and life success.

During parent training, emphasis is given to teaching and encouraging parents to self-manage their own anger, given that family conflict is associated with maladaptive behavior of children (Dunn & Tucker, 1993). Additionally, parents are strongly encouraged to engage in positive parenting behaviors that have been found to be significantly associated with higher academic achievement, higher adaptive skills, and/or lower maladaptive behaviors among low-income African American children. These positive parenting behaviors include frequent praise, use of encouragement rather than verbal reprimands and restrictions in response to low grades, and high grade expectations (Tucker, Brady, Harris, Tribble, & Fraser, 1993; Tucker, Harris, Brady, & Herman, 1996). Baby-sitting services, dinner for the family, and door prizes are used as incentives for parents to participate in the parent training.

Teacher training. The regular schoolteachers of the children in the Model Program and other interested teachers are trained via workshops to use the Model Program's self-empowerment-oriented methods and strategies in their classrooms. For example, they are trained to use and encourage their students to use the step-by-step teaching/learning method, the feedback formula, and self-praise. Teacher trainees receive continuing education units for this training.

Treatment Fidelity

Approximately 60 undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Florida, 10 public school teachers, and several parents and other community helpers deliver the Model Program intervention. With so many program partners, it is essential to ensure that the intervention is delivered as intended. The Model Program relies on training all participants, specifying responsibilities, and providing incentives to increase treatment fidelity. All program partners who deliver services to the children receive training in understanding and applying the program's three cornerstones.

Graduate students (usually four per semester) receive the most intensive training and, correspondingly, the most responsibility and incentives (e.g., assistantships, administrative titles, coauthorship on publications). They assist the program administrator in conducting all administrative, training, and research activities and in supervising the undergraduate tutors and undergraduate student researchers. Approximately 15 undergraduate research assistants assist with all research and intervention aspects of the Model Program and receive course credit for their work. They participate in weekly team meetings and serve as the direct consultants or mentors for the 50 or so undergraduate volunteers (who also receive course credit for their participation). Specific roles are assigned to each student to increase her or his responsibility and engagement with the team. Depending on the quality of their work, they may receive outstanding researcher awards and/or very positive letters of recommendation for graduate school.

Ten public school teachers provide specific educational guidance to tutors. The teachers and tutors receive extensive training and support from graduate and undergraduate researchers in applying the cornerstones of the program. One teacher, the program director, oversees the day-to-day operations of the Model Program to keep participants on task. All of the teachers receive a small monetary stipend for their work, and the tutors receive part of their grade in a course for which volunteer work (i.e., an applied experience) is required.

Summative Research on the Effects of the Model Program

The effects of the Model Program on the overall GPA, math GPA, reading GPA, adaptive skills levels, and frequency of maladaptive behaviors of low-achieving and low-income African American students have been empirically investigated and published (Tucker et al., 1995). In this research, participants were randomly selected from a computer printout of third- and ninth-grade students who lived in the low-income section of a local school district in north central Florida and met the following program-eligibility requirements: overall GPA of 2.5 or below and reading and/or math performance at least one year below grade level. Those students who agreed to participate were randomly assigned to the experimental group ($n = 28$) or the planned control group ($n = 48$). Other participants were students in the enrichment group or the default control group. The enrichment group ($n = 43$) consisted of students who were extended courtesy participation invitations because they and their families were members of the church where the study took place and who received individual tutoring in addition to the other program interventions. Eighty percent of these students were from low-income families as well. The default control group ($n = 29$) consisted of students who were initially assigned to the experimental group or the planned control group but who did not follow through in participating because of a schedule conflict, transportation problems, and/or involvement in another tutoring program. The four groups did not differ significantly in baseline overall GPA, math GPA, or reading GPA scores. For ethical reasons and as agreed with parents at the outset of the study, participants in the planned control group were invited to join the Model Program after one year.

After two years of program operation, data from all participants were collected from the local school district. Using baseline scores as covariates, repeated measures analyses of covariance were run to determine if there were significant differences over time in mean GPAs. Results revealed significant Group × Time differences such that from baseline to the second year of the program, the default control group experienced a significant decrease in mean math GPA (from 1.97 to 1.41). Additionally, there were significant Group × Time differences for reading GPA such that from Year 1 to Year 2, the enrichment group experienced a significant increase in reading GPA (from 2.59 to 2.66). Given that the enrichment group was the only group that received the full program intervention (e.g., individual tutoring), these findings support the importance of individual tutoring in facilitating academic performance.

Behavioral observations by program staff members, qualitative report-card data, and verbal feedback from the teachers of the children who participated in the Model Program indicated there were yearly increases in students' adaptive skills and decreases in their frequency of engaging in maladaptive behaviors and school misconduct. A follow-up study to determine if the group differences in GPAs were maintained four years later indicated that the children in the Model Program continued to have higher GPAs than the control group of children (Tucker et al., 1999). Unpublished data also indicate that children in the enrichment and experimental groups had significantly lower numbers of public school absences (6.1 and 6.2 days per year, respectively) at four-year follow-up compared with the default control group (21.0 days per year). In sum, results of this investigation indicate that participation versus nonparticipation in the Model Program had some gradual but significant beneficial effects on targeted GPAs, skills, and maladaptive behaviors.

Institutionalization and Nationwide Replication of the Model Program

Given the evidenced success of the Model Program, actions have begun to promote its replication and the dissemination of its teacher training across the nation. Specifically, we, our graduate and undergraduate students, and members of the Model Program staff are working together to (a) conduct workshops designed to train community leaders (e.g., educators, church leaders, and business leaders) from across the country to set up satellite partnership education programs (PEPs) similar to the Model Program, (b) conduct teacher-training workshops designed to train public school teachers from across the country to use the Model Program's methods and strategies in their regular school classrooms, (c) collect research data to evaluate the effects of the teacher training on teaching efficacy in general and specific to low-income African American children, and (d) evaluate the effects of the teacher training on the grades, school attendance, and behavior problems of African American children, Hispanic American children, and European American children who have low grades and/or behavior problems and who are students in the trained teachers' classrooms.

Three PEPs are underway, with the one most similar to the Model Program being located at the University of Missouri—St. Louis. Six teacher-training workshops have been conducted, and nine-week follow-up data collections to assess the earlier specified effects of these workshops are underway. The soon-to-be-launched Model Program and Teacher Training Web site will promote nationwide dissemination of the teacher training and nationwide establishment of PEPs.

Implications of the Model Program and the Associated Research

Implications for Educational Policy

It is clear from the success of the Model Program that one way to promote the academic and social success of socioeconomically disadvantaged African American children is to provide them with culturally sensitive, multidimensional education through university–school–community PEPs. Given the identified associations between these children's grades, adaptive skills, and behavior problems, promotion of multidimensional education that addresses all of these variables seems indicated. New policies are needed that

forge win–win financial, educational, and service partnerships between schools and groups who have the training, knowledge, time, and physical and human resources to help teach disadvantaged African American children the skills, behaviors, and cognitive–behavioral management strategies needed for academic, social, and life success. Such policies will be responsive to the reality that schools alone do not and likely cannot meet the multidimensional educational needs of the masses of these children.

Growing evidence suggests that university–community partnerships can be effective for addressing a wide range of community needs, including mentoring (Barron-McKeagney, Woody, & D'Souza, 2001), violence prevention (Randall, Swenson, & Henggeler, 1999), and HIV education (Madison, McKernan McKay, Paikoff, & Bell, 2000). There are many excellent resources with suggestions for developing such partnerships (see Fatt, 1999; Fialka & Mikus, 1999; Mebane & Galassi, 2000; Walsh, Thompson, Howard, Montes, & Garvin, 2000).

Groups within universities (e.g., academic psychologists and their students, computer science faculty), African American communities (e.g., parents, businesses, and churches), and European American communities (e.g., businesses and legislators) can work together as partners with schools to meet African American childrens' education needs. Policies that have an underlying win–win strategy will ensure the success of such partnerships. In other words, to establish education partnerships for promoting the academic and social success of African American children, education policies must provide and/or simply identify incentives and rewards for all of the partners involved to ensure the success of these partnerships.

Implications for Psychologists

An especially important implication of the success of the Model Program is that among those present at the education policymaking table must be academic psychologists who are culturally sensitive, including some who are African Americans. In addition to having the research skills, the knowledge, and the motivation to conduct the culturally sensitive research that is needed to fully understand and positively affect the academic plight of African American children, most culturally sensitive academic psychologists can bring a number of important resources to the education policymaking table. Specifically, they can bring identified human resources (e.g., graduate and undergraduate students) and physical resources (e.g., computer programs) for implementing academic and social behavior change programs, for empirically evaluating the effectiveness of these programs over time, and for writing grants to help support these programs and the evaluation process.

Academic psychologists can play major roles in establishing, conducting, and empirically evaluating these PEPs. These professionals can write research-training grants to help financially support the programs. They can use their professional training to help develop the self-empowerment training components, to identify interventions to deter and modify behavior problems of the participant students, and to help develop the parent training.

Academic psychologists can also assist with the implementation of all components of the PEP. In particular, these psychologists can use their research skills to develop and implement evaluations of the effects of PEPs and to write articles about PEPs and their impact. This latter role can facilitate dissemination and institutionalization of PEPs toward the goal of preventing academic failure among African American children across the nation.

It is important for psychologists to know how ecological factors such as racism, housing, economic status, and neighborhood affect the social behavior of African American children and families and how these social variables contribute to behavior problems (Comer & Hill, 1985). It is also important to become knowledgeable about African American families and the cultural differences among them. Books can inform psychologists about common cultural behaviors (e.g., the meaning of eye contact and silence, tardiness to or absence from an appointment). However, contact with culturally diverse African American families is also critical to understanding cultural differences among African American families. This contact can occur through volunteer counseling or tutoring, visiting African American churches or neighborhoods, and attending African American cultural events.

Finally, an important implication of the success of the Model Program and of the research associated with it is that there is a need for academic psychologists to move some of their classrooms and research labs to real-world disadvantaged communities where they can give (a) the masses of disadvantaged African American children the survival gift of self-empowerment for academic and social success, (b) university students the gift of a diversity-sensitive, real-world-based education that cannot be learned from textbooks, and (c) themselves as faculty the gift of experiencing firsthand the challenges involved in being a culturally sensitive researcher, therapist, teacher, and consultant.

Indeed, socially relevant and culturally sensitive scholarship and university–community partnership programs yield many benefits for veteran psychologists and their psychology trainees who engage in such scholarship and programs. Evolving models of participatory and collaborative research have recognized that university–community partnerships are mutually enhancing and rewarding (Ho, 2002; Roberts, Banspach, & Peacock, 1997). By definition, participatory researchers learn from community members as much as they teach.

Persistent Barriers to Culturally Sensitive Theories, Research, and Interventions

Many of the persistent barriers to developing culturally sensitive theories and research for understanding and promoting the academic and social success of African American children come from within academia. For instance, judging from peer reviews of some of our manuscripts, some within the field think that our directed attention to African American children borders on a racist agenda. Even when we have cited and described the difference

model approach, several reviewers have insisted that we articulate other reasons for focusing our research program on African American children to the exclusion of other children (additionally, much of our research work has attempted to apply some of the principles to other populations). Although this may be a reasonable request, we cannot help but wonder if other researchers are routinely questioned about studies with only European American participants (especially given the earlier mentioned finding that 40% of articles pass the review process without identifying the race/ethnicity of their samples). As others have asserted, researchers tend to question the generality of findings more vigorously when samples are composed of ethnic minorities (see Korchin, 1980; S. Sue, 1999). Our point is not to nitpick or complain—all authors occasionally receive upsetting reviewer comments. We highlight these barriers because they may reflect implicit universalist assumptions. We hope these examples encourage researchers to examine their own biases regarding research design, generalization, and sample-reporting and composition. It is not our intent to insist on the inclusion of ethnic minorities in all studies, for the principles of difference model research apply to ethnic majorities as well. It is our view, however, that the description of these participants should be provided, the research should be culturally sensitive, and generalizations from research findings should be limited to groups similar to the research participants.

Disregarding the race/ethnicity of research participants while assuming the universality of findings raises serious research and ethical concerns. For instance, failing to recruit African American children in research and then generalizing findings from research that does not include them in the sample is a significant methodological flaw (Nagayama Hall, 2001) that could lead to the application of completely ineffective, if not iatrogenic, interventions. Neither the current American Psychological Association (APA) Ethics Code (APA, 1992) nor its initial revisions adequately address this aspect of ethical research. Although the clinical sections of the code make specific reference to culturally competent practice, the research sections are surprisingly silent about cultural issues.

We contend that it is an ethical violation to present research without clearly specifying the race/ethnic distribution of the sample under study. To not discuss the race of participants implies that the findings apply to all peoples. This implication is especially troubling when it arises from research that did not have any ethnic diversity in its sample. Likewise, it is unethical to apply findings from research that lacked a diverse sample across ethnic groups. If psychologists accept the APA Ethics Code's aspirational guideline regarding social responsibility to create social justice, they must move toward attending to social justice in their research. As Dumas and colleagues (1999) wrote,

Researchers' failure to give careful consideration to the cultural background of participants in their interventions may lead them to ignore, inadvertently or deliberately, the social structural changes that need to be undertaken by society as a whole for the sake of social justice. (p. 179)

Conclusion

African American children, like other youth, want to be successful in school and in life; however, many do not have the skills, the behavioral repertoires (knowledge of success behaviors), and the parent, teacher, school, and community support needed to achieve this goal. Enabling African American youth to experience academic and social success requires not only the active effort of their families, schools, teachers, and communities but also academic and social training that is intense and that is culturally sensitive.

Community-based partnerships such as the Model Program offer many benefits to their participants as well as potential benefits to children and educators across the country. Children who participate in these programs experience improved academic achievement and adaptive functioning and reduced maladaptive behavior that are important for life success. Parents of child participants learn practical and nonthreatening strategies that enable them to be actively involved in the academic and social education of their children. Program teachers and students experience improved teacher–student relationships. Additionally, university student participants—future teachers and counselors—develop a working as opposed to a textbook knowledge of multicultural teaching and counseling.

Future applications of the methods and principles of PEPs may also benefit children, parents, and professionals throughout the nation. Communities and the nation will benefit from the working community partnerships that lead to improved race relations. The Model Program in particular provides a cost-effective model for meeting the education and social needs of children; furthermore, it complements the efforts of schools and teachers, is consistent with the multicultural education goals of most school districts, and is effective with children whose academic failure and behavior problems are most challenging for schools and teachers.

Empowerment of African American children for academic, social, and life success requires partnership efforts, commitment, and heart. It also requires the realization that African American children are like all children—they too are unique, special, and worthy of the contributions that psychologists can make toward enhancing their lives.

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