There is some concern regarding the status of the development of male youth in the industrialized and technologically developed nations of the world. We have the impression that it is not just males who identify themselves as Blacks who are in trouble, but young men all over the industrialized world. It appears that there may be something about the transition from childhood into adulthood for the males in modern societies that presents a greater challenge for boys than for girls. And it also may be that the challenge is not gender specific, just as it is not race specific, but that the challenge is being revealed differentially in different segments of the population. We may see male persons of color having greater difficulty because modern societies tend to be less supportive and more paradoxical for persons from lower caste groups in a world where color greatly influences caste. Fifty years ago, John Ogbu identified this problem in his studies of the relationships between caste and caste-like status and intellective development. At that time he showed that lower caste groups in India, Indonesia, Japan, USA and Western European nations lagged behind higher caste persons in those countries. He also documented differentials in opportunities for academic learning and social developmental support that were associated with caste status. Consider for a moment the possible notion that societies that are in the advanced stages of industrial and technological development present special problems for the transition from childhood to adulthood and that mal-adaptive behavior is likely to show up first in those segments of the population for whom the society provides the weakest systems of support and the greatest challenge. Since females tend to be under-represented in the industrial labor-force and there is less cultural demand that young women establish their roles there, the challenge of transition is less great for young women than it is for young men. Likewise, since the system tends to be more supportive for higher caste persons than for lower caste persons, the challenge is less great for persons of higher caste. Now please hold on to that notion for a moment.

Just last week in the mid-term elections here in the USA, we saw evidence of a radical political reaction to a transition in the political economy of the world society. The financial crisis in the US and the devastating rate of unemployment in the United States are a result of the de-industrialization of this country and its transition from a U. S. dominated agricultural/industrial economy to a globalized and high technologic economy. This change is most starkly reflected in the changes in the former industrial core of the United States – Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The economies and the social order in these states have been devastated. However, the economic turmoil in these states is not fundamentally different.
from that which can be seen in Great Britain, France, Germany and even Sweden. All over the previously industrialized world, we see disruptions of the political economies of previously industrialized capitalist societies. Could that destabilization have anything to do with the problems we see young males experiencing in the transition to manhood all over the world? Since that destabilization did not just happen but has been developing on several years, is it possible that these social orders have been “hostile environments” for young males for some time, and did we see the evidence first in those populations that are most vulnerable and least well supported by the social order – black boys and lower class or cast non-black males? What we see as problematic in the development of black boys may be the “canary in the mine.” We think that the developmental problems of young males of color in post-industrial technologically advanced countries may be the precursors to future problems in the development of human beings who struggle to develop under such dysfunctional conditions. If there is a chance that we are correct in this analysis, what then are the competencies such young people will need to develop if they are to protect and advance themselves in such an unsupportive world? The answer to this question could be helpful as we think about curriculum guidance for programs of education for male youth who identify themselves as Black. We propose a curriculum that is directed at the development of human agency in boys who identify themselves as Black.

Several goals appear to be indicated for a curriculum that is directed specifically at boys who identify themselves as Black in North America. There is no goal more important than is the goal of enabling these young men to achieve intellective competence which is grounded in such affective, cognitive and situative knowledge, techniques and dispositions as are necessary for the expression of human agency, i.e., behavior that reflects the capacity to think and act in one’s own best interest as well as in the best interest of one’s fellow human beings.

We refer to Intellective Competence as a characteristic way of adapting and adapting to, of appreciating, knowing and understanding the phenomena of human experience. We also use the construct to reference the quality with which these mental processes are applied in one’s engagement with quotidian, novel, and specialized problems. Intellective competence reflects the quality or goodness of the products of mental functioning (Gordon, 2001). Given the current state of education, we pretty much have to depend upon the usual academic disciplines as vehicles for developing these kinds of abilities, but academic content mastery should not be the end in pedagogy, rather the study and mastery of academic content can and should be the instrument for the development of intellective competence as is reflected in such capacities as:

- Self-regulation
- Analytical and Logical reasoning,
- Numeracy and Quantitative analysis,
- Pattern and relationship recognition,
- Contextualist and prespectivist thought,
- Relational adjudication,
- Problem solving skills, and
- Human agency
Gordon,

The curriculum for boys who identify themselves as Black should also help such students with the development of self-understanding, what we call personal and cultural identity. It means not only to know who we are but also to know how we function and why. In psychology we talk about: 1) meta-cognition, the understanding of how my mental processes work and 2) meta-componential strategies, knowledge and ability to apply these processes strategically to achieve certain ends. In a course that I developed some years ago, “Learning about thinking and thinking about learning”, we tried to help kids to learn what thinking is about, how it works, what the components are, etc, and then we wanted them to think about how to use those different mental strategies in solving problems. In other words, if we know that analogical reasoning, memorization and the establishment or recognition of patterns and associations are instrumentalities for learning and thinking; when we are confronted with a relevant problem and we know which of these instrumental capacities work together to solve this problem, we will function much more efficiently. For persons who have not been exposed to examples of such thinking, it is important that these patterns and strategies be made an explicit part of the formal learning experience. However, knowing how to manage one’s mental processes is only a part of the challenge. One needs also to know the why of human adaptive behavior. What is the intent behind the behavior? What purpose is to be served? Critical theorists refer to this as the action or knowledge interests are served.

There is perhaps, no problem concerning the nexus between teaching and learning for black males that is more important than are those associated with identity. They are the problems associated with how these young men are identified and how they identify themselves that have defined much of what is emerging as the education of black boys. Not alone do we have stereotyped conceptions of what these people are, we seem even more confused in our conceptions of who these young men think that they are or want to become. Much of our concern with this problem has confused cultural experience with cultural identity. We think that a mistake is made when we infer cultural identity from the stereotypical or even the real experiences we associate with Blacks who are young and male. Colloquial knowledge leads us to expect that humans are likely to develop attitudes and behaviors that are appropriate to the cultures in which they are acculturated and socialized, but in an age when in one’s formative years one may be exposed to multiple cultures with different features of each, contagion and imitation may be insufficient to explain persistent habits of behavior and/or mind. We posit a second process that may not be dictated by cultural experience, but by attribution and intentionality. We refer to cultural identity – the attitudes, behaviors, belief systems and life styles, mental images of that with which one identifies. Thus despite the wide variety of cultural experiences to which the senior author of this paper has been exposed, they are the attitudes and behaviors that he associates with his being an African American male that are the most powerful influences on his cultural identity. For many young black males these referent image are in conflict. E. T. Gordon has described one such conflict as that extant between the idea of respectability and the notion of reputation. Professor E. T. Gordon has concluded that these young men desire respect in a world that does not facilitate the achievement of respect for males who identify themselves as Black. These young men often substitute the pursuit of reputation for the pursuit of respectability, and in the process, tend to confuse reputation for respectability. Much of the dominant society is so structured as to deny respect to Blacks and
especially to Blacks who are males. In that circumstance reputation may be acquired more quickly and with less sustained effort, so the pursuit of reputation comes to substitute for the pursuit of respectability. One of the tasks of a pedagogy directed at the needs of the black boys, then, is that of creating teaching and learning experiences that enable, support and reward one’s having made the distinction between the pursuit of respectability and the pursuit of reputation, and that reinforce making the choice in favor of the pursuit of respectability, the capacity to command the approval and positive regard of others.

Each of our students should be enabled to develop **self-regulation**, the capacity to control or regulate himself. Some people argue that all behaviors are intentional. We may not recognize it, but it means that every activity serves some purpose. A mature and effective person understands the purpose served by an action and the personal conditions and behaviors that are necessary to achieve those goals. It means that one can direct and control his behavior to influence the outcomes of one’s actions. In colloquial terms people talk about “self control” or “deliberate behavior”, when the behavior is deliberately consistent with the intent of the behaving person. Self-regulation conjoins intentionality, targeted deployment of energy and resources and deliberate goal-directed action.

In our view, there is no competence that is more essential than is the capacity to use **analytical and logical reasoning** to make sense of the world and to guide goal-directed action. Thus it is that we give priority in our proposed curriculum to teaching and learning transactions that are designed to enable the capacities to analyze (qualitatively and quantitatively) the phenomena of the world, and to apply logical reasoning to the identification of components, processes, patterns and relationships in one’s life experiences. It may be that such learnings are typically gained from one’s ordinary encounters with other intelligent beings, but since the logic of the academy may be more specific to academic experience, the analytics and logic of the academy may need to be explicitly taught to young people who lives are not rich in such encounters.

- Numeracy and Quantitative analysis – the ability to use numbers and quantitative symbols and relationships to represent phenomena, to analyze status and relationships, and to reason as in the solving of problems.
- Critical literacy – the ability to derive colloquial and complex meanings from the symbolic representation of phenomena and ideas, and the capacity to adapt reading strategy to the content, context and complexity of the material being read.
- Pattern and relationship recognition,
- Contextualist and prespectivist thought,
- Relational adjudication,
- Problem solving
- Political socialization

It is also important that our curriculum contributes to the development of what we call “**human agency**”, the ability to act in one’s own self-interests and the interests of others without exploiting other people. The understanding of self interest can be explained as the recognition of what is in my best interest or the development of sensitivity about what my interests are. This is related to the development of “knowledge interests,” i.e., the part of critical thinking that deals with the capacity to understand whose interests are served by the knowledge in question, as
well as the knowledge interests of the producer or conveyor of the knowledge. Bandura (2001) suggests that the core features of human agency include intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Accordingly, to be an agent is to intentionally make things happen by one’s deliberate actions. But to be able to make things happen one needs to both know and understand what is the relevant knowledge and what the facts mean – to whom and under what conditions. Our notion of intellective competence is instrumental to the development of the capacity for human agency. E. W. Gordon places the achievement of the capacity to exercise agentic behavior at the top of his priorities for the education of African American males.

Curriculum Content and Processes

In the pursuit of these goals students should be enabled to learn from the following curriculum content areas:

- Essential skills and knowledge such as critical literacy, numeracy and knowledge acquisition and exchange skills; selected declarative and procedural knowledge from the hegemonic disciplines; and selected declarative and procedural knowledge and skills from one’s indigenous culture and from at least one additional culture. Much of this component of the curriculum is not unlike what we think should be included in any standard academic curriculum.
- Knowledge and understanding of the relationship between self and the political economy of black youth development in the United States and the dynamics of gendered roles and status.
- Deductive and inductive logical reasoning
- Communication, debate and self-presentation
- Non-violent conflict resolution
- Personal defense – physical, political and verbal: Our kids should be enabled to use mental strategies rather than depend on physical power in the same way that they are used in the Martial Arts. As we understand, the Martial Arts are based upon the strategic use of movement rather than physical force; this provides students with the ability to defend them at the same time that we train them to use their minds before using their bodies. We suggest that they develop the ability to strategically use ideas and logic to influence other people, to lead them and when necessary to best them.

One of the problems we are dealing with is a population that does not come from a history of rich and successful exposure to academic learning; as a result, we need to be sensitive to declarative knowledge, tacit knowledge and procedural knowledge. In pursuit of curriculum content, processes like personalization, explication and politicalization are proposed as showing promise.

Personalization

Students “need to understand the current state of their knowledge and to build on it, improve it, and make decisions in the face of uncertainty (McLaughlin and Talbert 1993).” One of the ways educators can enable students to meet this standard is to both personalize the learning environment and nurture those psychosocial attitudes and behaviors (including self-efficacy,
agency, motivational regulation, internal locus of control) that may be just as crucial in maintaining students' interest, performance, and commitment to academic excellence and achievement. For Gordon and Bridglall, personalization is a tri-focal phenomenon that references the extent to which: 1) the teaching and learning process is adapted to or fits with the characteristics of the learner, 2) the processes by which teachers and students relate in transforming what is being learned; and 3) the learner's identification with and ownership of products of the learning transaction. (Gordon & Bridglall 2006)

Explication

Part of the problem that people who are less than successful academically have is that they have not been explicitly taught how to use the knowledge, strategies or resources that they have available. Many of our kids do not grow up in environments that are rich in examples of the practical knowledge of how to solve problems in the abstract. We need to make this tacit knowledge explicit for them. As these students gain experience in such environments and see others applying tacit knowledge to solve academic, every day and technical problems, they are more likely to master the academic content.

Politicalization

In one of E. W. Gordon's chapters in the book Affirmative Development of Academic Ability he argues that politicalization is a neglected pedagogical process. There are class and caste conflicts to which insufficient attention has been given in the organization and delivery of educational services. If cultural and ethnic identification are important components of the learning experience, to ignore or demean them is poor education. If curriculum and delivery systems do not take these factors into account, inefficient learning may be the result. The argument is that education should help our kids to:

- foster, celebrate and assert one's own cultural identity, and show respect for that of the other;
- identify and understand the knowledge and policy interests of the phenomenon at hand;
- exercise critical thinking through contextualization, multiple perspective taking, knowledge interests identification and relational adjudication;
- teach and learn social action for responsible citizenship and humane social change;
- develop agentic behavior and strategic action, which can be defined as the assumption of responsibility for rational behavior in support of one's self and others without the abuse of others.

These are political as well as pedagogical concerns. They are pedagogical actions that can serve political purposes. It may be that the political implications need to be made explicit. E. T. Gordon claims that he became an effective student after he learned to map his academic experiences on to his own political agenda.

Some authors have called attention to the fact that there is no evidence that group differences per se imply any inability on the part of particular individuals in any group to meet the demands of society. We see no compelling evidence that any of the underdeveloped groups in our society are incapable of becoming effectively educated human beings. We reject the notion that black
males cannot become academically successful. Once we understand what should be special about the education of Black boys, and what is necessary for them to become effectively educated, we should be able to turn our energies and efforts to helping them to meet the demands of education and the demands of the society in which they live, to become intellectively competent persons. For us such competence includes the ability to become active participants (exercise human agency) in the process of the achievement of social justice. We believe that black males, like all human beings, but especially because of their special vulnerabilities must be educated to take responsibility for and leadership in the exercise of human agency.

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