A STRONG START: POSITIONING YOUNG BLACK BOYS FOR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

SYMPOSIUM SPONSORED BY EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICES WITH THE CHILDREN’S DEFENSE FUND
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The Condition of African American Boys:

Substantial numbers of boys of color have been thrust by a range of individual, interpersonal, familial, social, and environmental factors...

...onto a developmental trajectory that too often leads to adverse academic and social outcomes.

Combined influence of gender, SES and Race
Total Problems - behavior, emotions, learning pre-k to end of Kindergarten

Estimated Marginal Means of MEASURE_1 at PRESCHOOL: CHILD'S GENDER = M
Aim of Presentation

To discuss of contributions of

- Family
- School
- Community

To the Problem and Solutions
Family Contributions!
Family Life as Mediator of Economic and Ethnic Impacts on Academic Success

- Promote learning and emotional competence
- Expectations and values about:
  - What children are exposed to
  - How they should behave
  - How they give expression to their feelings
  - Climate for learning
  - Relationships and practices
  - Routines and structure
Figure 1. Family Practices, Characteristics and School Success, with canonical coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Practice</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide access to books</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with child’s school</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read to child</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eat breakfast together</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit the library</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell stories to child</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss family religion with child</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulate TV viewing (weekdays)</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value learning alphabets</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain emotionally close relationship with child</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Characteristic</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resident father figure</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental health and well-being</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s age</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community safety</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with parental role</td>
<td>-.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High academic expectations</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Canonical coefficients

**Family Characteristics**
- $r = .20$
- Wilk's Lambda = .96
- $\chi^2(7) = 136139$
- $p < .001$

**Family Practices**
- $r = .21$
- Wilk's Lambda = .96
- $\chi^2(9) = 132921$
- $p < .001$
1) Employ **Family** practices which optimize boys’ development

2) Expose child to competent, nurturing, **male role models**

3) Become involved in Child’s intellectual, academic, and socio-emotional growth
Child’s Weekday TV Viewing

[Bar chart showing hours of TV viewing by SES group (by quintile) for different racial and ethnic groups.]

- SES Group (by quintile): 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
- Y-axis: Hours (ranging from 1.0 to 3.0)
- Groups: White, Black, Latino, Asian
Child’s Weekend TV Viewing

The bar chart illustrates the weekend TV viewing hours by SES Group (by quintile) for White, Black, Latino, and Asian children. The chart shows that children in lower SES groups tend to watch more TV than those in higher SES groups.
Consequences of Growing Up with Few Male Models

• Confusion: How is a man supposed to act

• Distortions of Maleness: Hyper-masculinity

• Assumption of adult role: “protector” or “man of the house”

• Pre-mature independence: Autonomy without the requisite maturity and good judgment
Conditions for optimal development: What Boys Need from Their Families

1. Physical safety
2. Emotional warmth and acceptance
3. Competent adult practices related to discipline
4. Rich literacy environment and language interactions (talking, reading, telling stories)
5. Interest, involvement in academic development
6. Stimulating activities to fill the wasteland of time after school, weekends and summers
Academic Practices

- Direct teaching of specific skills, e.g., letter names and sounds
- Language stimulation, e.g., talking with child
  - Exposure to books
  - Home climate which values learning
- Support for those who teach the child
Non-specific Parental Practices

- Support and control to foster self-regulation and social competence
- Set and maintain limits
- Nurture ethnic identity
- Promote spirituality
Promising Family interventions

Parent training interventions with a focus on academic socialization, Self-regulation

Fatherhood programs that enhance the involvement of fathers and father surrogates with boys;

Focus on Character, social and moral development
Explaining the Problem: Schools

How Schools contribute to the problems of boys
Poor and ethnic minority children attend schools with:

- High concentrations of ethnic minority poor children
- Peers who have below-average skills
- Teachers who are less experienced
- Teachers who have low performance expectations
- More danger and less adequate facilities
- Poorer facilities: fewer books, science labs,
- Fewer music, art, and drama rooms
**Poor Fit Between Boys and Typical Classroom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys are predisposed toward</th>
<th>Schools prefer and reward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate and interact through -kinesthetics, -movement,</td>
<td>Verbal mastery and fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct communication</td>
<td>Inductive indirect communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on activities that rely on gross motor skills</td>
<td>Quiet desk work using fine motor skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low control of behavior</td>
<td>High control of behavior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Impact of Mismatch on Boys

Boys viewed as poorly adjusted

Boys more often subjected to punishment

Boys more often assigned to special education

Higher rates of grade retention among boys

Boys’ masculine posturing, may be misinterpreted as hyper-aggression and hostility
Inexperienced teachers may misinterpret boys’ behavior.

Boys are perceived as miscreants.

Boys’ challenging behaviors are disciplined harshly.
Teachers react with an emotionally distant and overly punitive approach.
Frustration Tolerance from Pre-k to end of Kindergarten
Internalizing Symptoms from Pre-K to end of Kindergarten

Estimated Marginal Means of MEASURE_1
at PRESCHOOL: CHILD`S GENDER = M

Estimated Marginal Means

Time

1
2
3

Child Race
3 grp LA, AA, White

Latino
Black
White
Relations with Peers pre-K to end of Kindergarten

Estimated Marginal Means of MEASURE_1 at PRESCHOOL: CHILD`S GENDER = M

- Child Race 3 grp LA, AA, White
- Estimated Marginal Means
  - Latino
  - Black
  - White

Time
1 2 3
School Environments That Facilitate First Grade Reading Success

**CLASS**

**PEERS**  With high skills
**PRACTICE**  Multiple opportunities to use reading and writing

**TEACHERS**

**EXPERIENCE**  Teaching first grade
**EXPECTATIONS**  Strong belief in children’s capacity to learn

**WHOLE SCHOOL**

**POVERTY**  Low concentrations in one school
**PROBLEMS**  Of community resources, safety are addressed

[Note: Based on data from the ECLS-K analyzed by Aikens and Barbarin, 2006]
What schools can do!

- High Quality Early childhood-
- Developmentally responsive, Full day kindergarten
- Support Families, treat them as allies
- Accommodate the styles, preferences of Boys
- Focus as much on support and enrichment as Discipline and control
- Nurture individual and emotionally close connections with boys.
The Role of Communities
- Limited opportunities for enrichment activities
- Unsafe, isolated
- Overcrowded, unstable
- Poor quality housing
- Low efficacy, anomic
- Policies which fail to serve boys well
Growing Up in Risky Communities

Economic and Material disadvantage

Social isolation and stigma

Dearth of social capital

Limited access to libraries, recreational facilities, organized activities

Low involvement with nurturing males
Community interventions

Community-based mentoring for boys (e.g., Big Brothers, Big Sisters)

Leadership/advocacy development to enhance the capacity of communities to advocate for boys

Addressing policies which adversely affect boys
Prevalence of the Problem is overestimated

- The serious implications and the catastrophic nature of the problems obscures that fact that most are doing ok

- Academic Problems -- in the range of 40%
- Behavioral/ Emotional -- About 20%
- Serious Psychological difficulty 4-6%
- Trauma is common
- Most problems are adaptations to Abnormal situations
Contact Information

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