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The Educational Resilience of Black Males: An Ecological Analysis of Inner-city Students

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ABSTRACT

- Black males are often relegated to high poverty schools in the inner city due to socioeconomic status (Task Force on Resilience, 2008). There is a growing concern surrounding the academic achievements of Black males attending inner-city public schools. To this end, a great deal of literature highlights the poor performance of Black males and the challenges they face (Ferguson, 2003; William & Bryan, 2013).
Much of the literature provides insufficient context regarding the trials incumbent upon these students, which fails to highlight their resilience. There is a dearth of literature on the educational resilience of Black males in the inner city. (O’Connor, 1997; Randle, 2012; William & Bryan, 2013). Yet, many Black males from troubling backgrounds are continuously defying the odds in education. Using an ecological theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2012), I have been exploring how Black males from impoverished backgrounds often overcome massive obstacles impacting their education.
The purpose of this research is to analyze and highlight the educational resilience of a marginalized group which is often depicted as academically inferior when compared to Caucasian (and all) students.
Researchers have provided an assortment of definitions for the term *resilience*. Among the various definitions researchers have provided, the concept of *overcoming a traumatic or significant challenge* is a commonality embedded in each of their definitions (Bryan, 2005; Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

More specifically, Bryan (2005) defines *educational resilience* as “the ability of children to succeed academically despite risk factors that make it difficult for them to succeed” (p. 220). Using an ecological model will help us to better understand the risk factors which complicate the academic achievement of Black males.
William & Bryan (2013) argue that the home, school, and community environment significantly contribute to the educational resilience of Black male students in the inner city. Numerous prominent scholars in the field of education concur with their findings (Randle, 2012; Task Force, 2008).

O’Connor (1997) conducted a case study using six resilient Black high school students in Chicago. She discovered the students’ embracing of their race to be a major factor and a constantly emerging theme throughout her research.
Williams & Bryan (2013), in their study, discovered ten common factors students articulated as contributing to their educational resilience:

(1) School-related parenting practices, (2) positive mother-child relationships, (3) personal stories of hardship, (4) extended family networks, (5) supportive school-based relationships, (6) school-oriented peer culture, (7) good teaching, (8) extracurricular school activities, (9) social support networks, and (10) out-of-school time activities. In both studies, students did share commonalities regarding family, community, and hardships experienced growing up in poverty. Many of those common factors contributed to students’ resilience.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ecological theory of human development reflects the multiple layers of environmental factors impacting the growth and improvement of a child (Bronfenbrenner, 1975; Stewart, 2007; Ungar, Ghazinour, and Richter, 2013). Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines human development as “the person’s evolving conception of the ecological environment, and his [sic] relation to it, as well as the person’s growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties” (p. 9). It is imperative for schools to comprehend the direct and indirect impact of ecological systems on Black males in urban areas to improve their educational outcomes. There are five systems associated with the assessment of environmental factors which the ecological theory of human development uses. The five systems and their contextual influences at each level are as follows:

- **Microsystem**: friends, family, peers, school, afterschool programs
- **Mesosystem**: home, school, community centers, neighborhood
- **Exosystem**: extended family, parental workplace, health and social service
- ** Macrosystem**: dominant beliefs, cultural values, attitudes, ideologies
- **Chronosystem**: the influence of time both in the individual’s life trajectory (developmental phases) and historical context.
IMPLICATIONS

Educating young Black males in urban areas with an ecological approach has been proven to be effective (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; King, 2011). This research indicates it is critical to take into consideration the environmental factors which impact the education of Black males.

Having knowledge of the obstacles many Black males encounter allows for the development of strategies to help minimize the impediments and foster resilience.

Rather than focusing on the negative aspects of Black males’ education, as with the deficit model (Ford, 2011), more attention should be given to success narratives regarding resilience.
RECOMMENDATIONS

It is essential that teachers, school leaders, and educational policy makers have an understanding of the environmental factors at the home, community, and school levels that impact Black males and their academic performance.

Once these factors are taken into consideration, better teaching strategies and educational interventions can be developed to help foster resilience and increase the graduation rate of Black males.


THANK YOU

Questions

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