Motivating African-American College Students through Course-Integrated Library Instruction: Exploring the Role of Encouragement

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Revitalizing Library Instruction at Bennett College for Women

- All-female, historically black college
- +/- 700 full-time students
- Freshmen come with limited library research experience and significant research anxiety

- Prior to Fall 2007: +/- 11 BI and orientation sessions per year
- AY 2008-2009: 78 course-integrated & 93 total instruction sessions
Revitalizing Library Instruction at Bennett College for Women

- Strategies for increasing faculty and student participation in library instruction:
  1. Coordination of instruction and content with C. Kuhlthau’s *Information Search Process*
  2. Instructional and programmatic emphasis on student encouragement

The Encouragement Imperative: Why, When, Where, and How

- Why is fostering students’ perception of encouragement important?
- When and where should librarians emphasize encouragement?
- What strategies should librarians employ to increase perception of encouragement?
The Motivational Perspective: Academic Self-Concept and Theories of Motivation

- Attribution Theory
  - An attribution is the *perceived* cause of an event.
  - Individuals are naïve scientists trying to understand the world around them.
  - Internal vs. external attributions: making an external attribution for a negative outcome allows one to maintain self-concept or self-esteem, while making an internal attribution for a negative outcome may result in lower self-concept or self-esteem.
The Motivational Perspective: Academic Self-Concept and Theories of Motivation

Social-Cognitive Theory

- This theory recognizes the impact of social factors and context on an individual’s behavior.
- Goals: Individuals make goals based on their perceived ability to reach those goals.
- Self-Efficacy: An individual’s perceived capability for performing in a certain capacity.
- Self-Regulated Learning: An individual engages in SRL when he/she enacts self-efficacy in the pursuit of goals.
- Triadic Reciprocity (Bandura): individual, behavior, and environment.
The Motivational Perspective: Academic Self-Concept and Theories of Motivation

- **Self-Determination Theory**
  - This theory examines the reasons why individuals perform or avoid activities.
  - Locus of Causality: is the individual motivated intrinsically (from within) or extrinsically (outside control)?
  - Basic Psychological Needs: autonomy, relatedness, competence.
  - What contextual factors support vs. thwart an individual?
The Motivational Perspective: Predictors of Academic Self-Concept Among African-American College Students

- Academic self-concept: a student’s beliefs about his/her abilities as an individual and in comparison with other students.
- There is a reciprocal relationship between academic self-concept and achievement.
- Individuals exhibit domain-specific academic self-concepts.
- Academic self-concept is not fixed and does not exist in a vacuum.
The Motivational Perspective: Predictors of Academic Self-Concept Among African-American College Students

- Sandra Graham (1994) reviewed 133 studies in her synthesis of research on motivation in African-Americans.
  - Studies reviewed did not investigate causes and factors behind “persistence, choice, and subject matter of behavior” (p. 103).
  - She listed principles for motivational psychology for African-Americans, including:
    - explicit attention to factors related to the self.
    - explicit attention to a range of cognitive and affective factors, such as academic self-concept.
Kevin Cokley has asked, “What do we know about the motivation of African American students?”

Cokley (2000) examined predictors of academic self-concept among African-American students:

- At PWCUs, GPA was first, followed by quality of student-faculty relationships.
- At HBCUs, quality of student-faculty relationships was first: “academic self-concept of students attending HBCUs is affected by much more than their GPA” (p. 161).
The Motivational Perspective: Perception of Faculty Encouragement as Key Predictor of Academic Self-Concept

- Kimberly Griffin (2006) interviewed nine high-achieving African-American college students to understand factors contributing to their motivation and to their reactions to challenges and setbacks.
- The participants identified several external factors: “the knowledge this research provides about the ways in which externally influenced factors can potentially encourage the motivation and internal drive towards academic success for Black students enables administrators, policy makers, professors, and parents to act in ways that can more broadly influence Black students to develop their academic motivation.” (p. 398)
Cokley (2003) looked to develop a cohesive theory of motivation for African-American students. He found that “perceptions of faculty encouragement significantly predicted academic self-concept” (p. 552). HBCU students reported more positive perceptions of faculty encouragement than students at PWCUs. Perceptions of faculty encouragement were the number one factor predicting positive academic self-concept. “Educators of African American students should never underestimate the power of encouragement, as it serves as an important component of student-faculty interaction and speaks to the quality of the student-faculty relationship.” (p. 553).
Libraries as Promoters of, and Contributors to, Students’ Academic Self-Concept and Motivation

- Awareness of the “linkage between perception of faculty encouragement and academic self-concept provides librarians with a powerful tool for fostering motivation among African-American college students.”*

- Emphasis on encouragement links up perfectly with instructional design aligned with Kuhlthau’s *Information Search Process*, which places equal weight on students’ cognitive and affective experiences.

When, Where, and How: Encouragement and Course-Integrated Instruction

- Emphasize relationships:
  - Student—Librarian
  - Librarian—Professor

- Present less, mentor more:
  - Don’t teach every resource and every feature—instead, focus on motivating students to return to the resources.
  - Address research anxiety early and often.
  - Participate in students’ topic and focus formation.
When, Where, and How: Encouragement and Course-Integrated Instruction

- Show understanding and mastery of students’ research tasks.
  - Get the syllabus, know the assignment.
  - Know where students stand in the process.

- Emphasize what the student will/should be doing when the session ends.
  - Help the student understand where she stands in the research process *right now* and how to move forward.
  - Emphasize the library staff’s expertise and willingness to *contribute* to the students’ research.
  - Market the library’s services (Sobel, 2009).
When, Where, and How: Creating a Community of Encouragement

- Coordinate your services—and your customer service—to emphasize continued support and encouragement.
  - Route students to your reference librarians and subject experts quickly.
  - Emphasize personal relationships with students—don’t pass students off or pass them around.
  - Take interest—and show willingness to participate—in the student’s entire project, from beginning to end.
  - Customer service is critical!
Creating a Community of Encouragement: Experiences at Bennett College Since AY 2006-2007

- Faculty buy-in
  - 772% increase in total instruction sessions
  - Increased multiple-session instruction
  - Increased collaboration on assignments
  - Integration of library instruction into first-year Literature and Writing sequence

- Students are using resources more:
  - 50% increase in circulation
  - 450% increase in use of reference collection
  - 77%—2400% in use of electronic resources
References

