

## Biography for Career Convergence Article

Marc Anderson Grimmatt, PhD., is an assistant professor of counselor education at North Carolina State University, where he is coordinator of the community agency counseling program. He is also a licensed counseling psychologist on staff with a community mental health agency. His clinical work as well as his research focuses on preparing African American boys to live happy and successful lives.

Running head: CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS

Early Career Development of African American Boys

Marc Anderson Grimmett

North Carolina State University

### Abstract

The early career development of African American boys (grades 3-5, 8-10 years old) is enhanced by structured activities based on their specific needs. This article describes a program based on this concept.

### Early Career Development of African American boys

If you ask an African American boy in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade what he wants to be when he grows up, he may respond “professional athlete, entertainer, or police man.”

Occupational aspirations are likely to reflect what he has been exposed to in his social environment. Parents, caregivers, teachers, neighborhood adults, as well as school, church, television, magazines, internet, radio, and even video games all provide information for his developing career template. Children at this developmental stage tend to aspire to occupations that hold the most interest for them, but are influenced by perceived gender roles. For African American boys, race often plays an important role in occupational aspirations as well (Gottfredson, 2002).

Intentional career development interventions for African American boys are needed because their early career context is unique. African American males are overrepresented in special education (and in the juvenile justice system), disproportionately suspended and expelled, and underrepresented in advanced classes (Bailey, 2004). Negative educational outcomes increase the likelihood of underachievement, school incompleteness, unemployment, poverty, drug addiction, incarceration, and/or premature death by violence (Perry, Steele, Hillard, 2003).

Fortunately, despite these social realities, many African American males thrive. Successful African American males provide a focus for career interventions, because they possess the dynamic blueprint and skill sets from which these interventions can be developed. Brothers in Excellence (BE), a career and skill development program for

African American boys in grades 3-5 (8-10 years old), was designed based on this concept.

### Brothers in Excellence

Excellence is a state of: (a) awareness of one's potential and (b) performance perseverance at the highest level of one's ability, in all areas necessary to achieve one's dreams, regardless of circumstances (Grimmett, 2006). BE acknowledges outright that *all* African American boys are capable of excellence.

The primary objectives of the BE program are for participants to:

- (1) develop an understanding of excellence and its relationship to success
- (2) expand their career aspirations
- (3) broaden their occupational knowledge
- (4) generate a developmentally appropriate, detailed, and adaptable vision of their own personal and career success
- (5) cultivate specific skills for success

The BE program is operated through a series of dynamic and interactive seminars that feature successful African American male professionals. These professionals provide the modeling necessary to make personal success an accessible reality for the participants. Seminars are conducted on a university campus which exposes participants to a higher education environment and enables them begin to develop a sense of familiarity and belonging. Each seminar has its own topic related to career development and can operate as an individual unit. In addition to the seminars, participants are taken on field trips, facilitated by African American male professionals, to worksites, colleges, and universities.

Field trips are an experiential program component that brings information provided in seminars to life for the young participants. It also provides an additional opportunity for participants to interact with and learn from successful African American male role models. Concrete learning experiences are particularly effective for participants at the elementary and middle grade level in that they activate multiple domains of development simultaneously, engage all of the senses, and allow information several points of entry as well as places for “storage” (Santrock, 2006). Information acquired from seminars and field trips require the development of complimentary essential skills for personal goal attainment.

Essential skills are defined within the BE program as abilities (e.g., the ability to make reasoned decisions) and actions (i.e., behaviors) that are critical to the success of the African American boy. One easy example of an essential skill taught in the BE program is how to execute a firm handshake. On the other end of the essential skills continuum would be the ability to clearly express one’s ideas verbally as well as in writing. Career-related skills empower participants by teaching them the tools for success.

The long term effects of an early career intervention are determined over time; however the immediate positive impacts of the BE program are readily apparent. It was obvious to see the attention commanded by a college student football player when he talked to BE participants about the importance of their appearance and presentation. The boys responded immediately to whatever he asked them to do. “Sit up straight!” Done. “Look me in the eye when you introduce yourself.” Yes sir! Their eagerness to meet his expectations was palpable. The student athlete was invited to a BE seminar by the

academic coordinator for student athletes, who was the featured presenter. He facilitated a small group discussion about academics, athletics, and job opportunities. This is just one example of the willingness and desire many African American male adults have to make a positive contribution to African American boys. Seminar presenters share their meaningful and satisfying experiences with colleagues and friends, who then volunteer to be involved with the program.

The strength of the BE program is that it creates learning opportunities. For every intentional activity which has an expected result, there are several positive outcomes that simply come out of the experience. One parent shared that her son, who loves soccer, never considered that he could play in college, until he saw a team practicing while on a BE field trip to a campus. Another proud parent said that after one Saturday seminar, her son and his friends were so excited that they continued to work on their self-awareness worksheets while on the ride home. Embedded in the mission of the program is that learning does not stop with the end of each seminar or field trip, rather participants are motivated to explore, to use their skills, and to achieve.

## References

- Bailey, D. F. (2004). Developing and nurturing excellence in African American male adolescents. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 82(1), 10-17.
- Gottfredson, L. S. (2002). Gottfredson's theory of circumscription, compromise, and self-creation. In D. Brown & Associates (Eds.), *Career choice and development* (4th ed., pp. 85-148). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Grimmett, M. A. (2006). Nurturing aspirations and potential theory of excellence: Career development of African American boys. *Vistas: compelling perspectives on counseling*, 95-98. Retrieved July 20, 2006 from <http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas06/vistas06.20.pdf>
- Perry, T., Steele, C., & Hillard, III, A. (2003). *Young, gifted, and Black: Promoting high achievement among African American students*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Santrock, J. W. (2006). *Life-span development* (10th ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.