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Dr. Benson Reid's current project is ACCESS Dental Laboratory. ACCESS Dental Laboratory is a full-service, light manufacturing, tech, company that specialize in dental restorations.

Dr. Benson Reid's personal motto is "inspire individuals to pursue self-discovery, empower them to be innovative, progressive and revolutionary in thought and motivate them to be global activists."

Dr. Benson Reid's work is changing the landscape of society by empowering individuals, families and organizations. At ACCESS Global Enterprises, "we encourage self-assessment and self-discovery while promoting innovative and progressive designs for change and implementing strategies for sustained success. Our goal is equity and empowerment for the underserved and underrepresented.

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THE CARDS

The Unexpected Outcome

I never expected to be here. I was told early on that I should be a teacher, but I had no interest. I spent a great deal of time tutoring in high school and I liked helping my classmates, however, I hated working on specific content. That being said, success is gratifying so I worked hard in all of my classes: early mornings, late nights, whatever it took. I did very well. Please understand, school, did not come easy but I was academically committed.

Upon graduation from high school, I was awarded an academic scholarship, in addition, I was also pregnant. I took my first quarter off then I reenrolled. I failed miserably and was placed on academic probation. Attending college as a single, young mother was one of my greatest challenges. Eventually, I left the university and began attending the local community college. However, I lacked dedication and withdrew from more classes than I completed.

Then something happened. I realized there was more to life than driving a school bus, not that driving a bus is bad; it still remains one of my favorite experiences.

Nonetheless, I had a renewed commitment. I completed my coursework at the community college and returned to the university. I earned my A.A. and B.A. in the same year. I was accepted into a graduate program and planned to study Sociology of Education with an emphasis on Race, Class and Gender. I was driven, focused and motivated. The thoughts of being a schoolteacher had faded and life was moving at a terrific pace.

Earlier, I mentioned being pregnant with my first child when I graduated from high school. Eighteen months after her birth, I had a son. I noticed glaring differences between my two children but I attributed these variances to gender. I was wrong. My son's kindergarten teacher explained her concerns and did her best to ease my frustration. Every year after that was traumatic. He struggled mightily: poor tests grades, missing homework assignments, inattention during instruction, frequent trips to the principal's office and numerous parent-teacher conferences. I remember one conference in particular; during our meeting the teacher disclosed, "She should not have to put up with his behaviors." I was livid, gave her a piece of my mind and made the decision to change my graduate major.

Education needed me and I was up for the challenge. I met with my mentor, enrolled in a teacher education program and the rest is history.

The State of Education

Philosophically, I do not believe in the structure of public education. Our entire system is inadequate and antiquated. As a student, I recall thinking to myself; nothing this teacher is doing is causing me to get excited about education. I'm not interested in math, I'm not interested in science, I'm not interested in social studies and I'm not interested ELA, I guess in actuality I wasn't interested in school but I trusted the process so I pressed on.

In the profession, we like to believe that education has evolved. We've incorporated manipulative, charts, graphs and visual representations. We allow movement, flexible seating, alternate assessments but the curriculum remains the same.

Other aspects of society have improved, however the most important societal component has not; education has remained the same. How can we justify not revolutionizing our current educational system while our students have evolved, our society has advanced and other industries have adapted?

The wheels of progress turn slowly in education so instead of waiting for a system-wide transformation, I decided to take a proactive approach.

A New Challenge

“What if educators truly loved all children and promoted pedagogical practices that challenged the social justification of poverty, sexism, classism, exploitation, and racism?”
Dr. S. R. B. Reid

Impeding Academic Achievement

In most school settings, children from diverse backgrounds and situations are less likely, when compared to middle-class and majority students, to have positive relationships with their middle-class teachers who do not represent similar backgrounds and situation. These differences reflect teachers' biases, classroom management styles, and disparities in the severity of practices used for discipline. The use of prejudicial classroom management techniques with marginalized students is a common practice. Teachers, often times, perceive the behavior of males from diverse circumstances as more aggressive and severe than the behaviors of their non-diverse counterparts. These males who misbehave in the same way as their counterparts are more likely to be punished resulting in suspensions and expulsions. The severity of these disciplinary practices with minority students impedes their achievement in the classroom, excludes them from advanced courses, alienates them from the general school population, increases incidents of misbehavior, and leads to lower academic expectations and higher drop-out rates.

Socioeconomic Status

Classroom disciplinary practices are also influenced by students' socioeconomic status. Educators tend to view low-income students as having the highest potential for behavioral problems. Consequently, students from low-income homes, regardless of ethnicity, are disciplined more often than middle-class students. In addition, teachers of low socioeconomic children most often use or support the use of corporal punishment, verbal punishment, or suspension, when compared to teachers of middle-class students. Some of the behaviors by culturally diverse, lower socioeconomic status students that teachers find annoying and/or problematic are behaviors that serve as a function in the students' world outside of school.

Locked Out

Student behavior is severely scrutinized when teachers and administrators do not understand and /or represent diverse backgrounds and situations. From this perspective, marginalized students' behavior is not just different from their non-marginalized counterparts in culturally arbitrary ways; it disrupts what schools are attempting to accomplish, causing hostile dynamics in the educational environment. Subsequently, students from diverse backgrounds and situations are more inclined to misbehave when they are matched with teachers who do not represent diverse groups versus being matched with teachers who do. This stressed relationship between students and teachers leads to students eventually being locked out of education due to suspension/expulsion and prevents academic success causing a resistance to schooling and other majority-controlled institutions: which further perpetuates feelings of oppression and subjugation. In an attempt to maintain “group” identity, marginalized students develop peer groups that reject symbols and behaviors that are not in alignment with “group” think and

academically successful students from diverse backgrounds and situations, are frequently at risk of being sanctioned by peers for rejecting “group” values.

Discipline and Cultural Congruence

On the other hand, many teachers from diverse backgrounds and situations are able to operate with ease when disciplining marginalized students. The teacher’s ability to achieve this task is possible because students and parents have culturally congruent backgrounds with the teachers. This cultural congruence helps the stakeholders relate to one another more efficiently. Identifying connections further bridges necessary gaps that foster healthy relationships and open communication between students, parents, and teachers. Parents are more willing to accept corrective language and consequences when there are similarities between the participants.

Conversely, when a teacher who does not identify with diverse circumstance is faced with the daunting task of disciplining a student from a diverse condition, underlying factors must be considered; preexisting beliefs about poverty, racially discriminatory practices, disconnection and lack of trust to name a few. The problem with educating students of color in America is precisely that, a problem because our school system is a microcosm of our society. Therefore, disenfranchised students suffer in schools because staff, who have the power to label, categorize and define, are not always well-intentioned, yet these feelings of oppression are mitigated when disenfranchised parents work with teachers from diverse backgrounds and situations.

The Transformation

Research clearly states adequate representation in the teaching profession improves educational outcomes for all students. However, the focus must not center

entirely on diversifying K – 12 classrooms, but it is also necessary to investigate the needs of marginalized students, and how these needs are met on a continuous basis.

In short, much can be gained from adopting a teaching philosophy that prioritizes student wellness and success over standardized testing and district distinction.

Trusting Relationships

Educating students from marginalized circumstances is a complex process involving big-picture considerations and specific instructional strategies; at the very least, these students need to know adults in their lives are aware of the cultural and social situations they encounter on a consistent basis and truly care about their personal and academic success. From this foundation, trusting relationships develop and serve as an essential context for learning. While this bridge from awareness and caring to learning and achievement is necessary for a successful school career, it is vitally important for students from disenfranchised backgrounds, who tend to experience more challenges in their personal and academic lives. Students from these backgrounds and communities benefit from the type of support that nurtures emotional growth while simultaneously providing optimal conditions for effective learning.

The data extrapolated from the research reveals educators who serve as counselor, advocate, role model, disciplinarian and surrogate parent (*The CARDS Method*) embody the necessary characteristics that encourage expressive maturity while cultivating environments that promote academic success for students who represent diverse backgrounds and situation.

The CARDS Method

The CARDS Method was developed to help educators create a more equitable educational environment, however, achieving equity requires an individualized approach to education. This shift in thinking involves understanding each student's individual needs and designing educational experiences that help all students achieve. *The CARDS Method* is based on the historical roles of African American educators Prior to Brown versus Board of Education and are as follows:

- Counselor (C),
- Advocate (A),
- Role Model (R),
- Disciplinarian, (D) and
- Surrogate Parent (S)

The Counselor - These educational environments provide venues for resource development, community leadership, and extraordinary service.

The Advocate - These schools serve as community institutions in which everyone has a vested interest.

The Role Model - These schools help children develop their fullest potential, including the potential to relate to all other human beings in a manner, which is free and constructive.

The Disciplinarian - Relationships are the key component of academic success in these educational communities.

The Surrogate Parent - Above all else, these institutions know the importance of genuinely caring for and loving their students.

Summary

The limited presence of African Americans in the teaching profession is a serious problem confronting the field of education and African American communities across the United States. Education is a stagnated, bureaucratic system and change is not in the

immediate future. Therefore, *The CARDS Method* was created to address the needs of students who represent diverse backgrounds and situations in the interim.