Closing the Academic Achievement Gap For African-American Boys

FREE WEBINAR: August 23, 2011 2 p.m. to 3 p.m., EDT
Nirvi Shah
staff writer, Education Week
Closing the Academic Achievement Gap for African-American Boys

Expert Presenters:

Oscar A. Barbarin III, Hertz Endowed Chair in Psychology, Tulane

Aisha Ray, Rochelle Zell Dean’s Chair, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty, Erikson Institute
An on-demand archive of this webinar will be available at www.edweek.org/go/webinar in less than 24hrs.
Promoting Socio-Emotional Competence in African-American Boys

Oscar Barbarin, Tulane University

Webinar: Closing the Academic Achievement Gap for African-American Boys
Aim of Presentation

- Outline the problem
- Consider some causes
- Discuss what teachers can do
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
### Poor Fit Between Boys and Typical Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys are predisposed toward</th>
<th>Schools prefer and reward</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate and interact through kinesthetics, movement</td>
<td>Verbal mastery and fluency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direct communication</td>
<td>Inductive indirect communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hands-on activities that rely on gross motor skills</td>
<td>Quiet desk work using fine motor skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low control of behavior</td>
<td>High control of behavior</td>
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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
Teachers react with an emotionally distant and overly punitive approach.
Inexperienced teachers sometimes misinterpret boys’ behavior. Boys are viewed as miscreants. Boys’ challenging behaviors are disciplined harshly.
Frustration Tolerance from Pre-K to End of Kindergarten

Estimated Marginal Means of MEASURE_1

at PRESCHOOL: CHILD'S GENDER = M
Internalizing Symptoms from 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
- Latino
- Black
- White

Estimated Marginal Means

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
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</table>
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

- Blue: Latino
- Green: Black
- Yellow: White

Estimated Marginal Means

Time

1 2 3

3.60 3.70 3.80 3.90
1. Regulation of attention and behavior
2. Emotional knowledge and regulations
3. Social skills, especially conflict resolution
4. Positive peer relationships
5. Emotionally warm and supportive relationship with teacher
What Teachers Can Do!

- Accommodate boys’ interests and need for movement in the classroom.
- At beginning of year let children develop rules for the type of classroom environment they want to learn in.
- Focus on support of boys’ self-control and emotional understanding rather than punishment coercion.
- Nurture individual and emotionally close connections with boys and positive relations with peers.
Strategies: Accommodate Class

- Permit boys to move, stand, lean over while they are working
- Incorporate movement and action in instruction
- Use dance and rhythm to teach math and words
- Boys love competition; use as a source of motivation and games. Form teams around academic tasks.
- Read and talk about the disgusting and scary stuff boys find interesting.
Strategies: Emotional Education

- Teach boys to recognize and label feelings.
- When tempers flare and fights erupt wait to process and suggest alternatives until after boys cool down.
- Encourage boys’ co-operation, sharing, and helping.
- Explicitly teach rules and strategies for conflict resolution.
- Play games such as Simon Says, Red-Light to teach self-regulation.
Strategies: Develop Relationships

- Spend individual time with a boy each day.
- Eat lunch with a boy.
- During a break or recess: Take one boy and read /enjoy a book with him.
- Find something positive to note about boys.
Relationship Strategies (Continued)

- Develop a relationship with the boys’ families.... Prior to problems.
- Include them in developing strategies to address behavioral or emotional issues surrounding the boy.
Contact Information

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Closing the Academic Achievement Gap for African-American Boys

Aisha Ray, Ph.D.
Rochelle Zell Dean’s Chair
Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and
Dean of Faculty
Erikson Institute

Education Week Webinar
Five major points for today

1. Unique factors that shape Black child development

2. Early separate and unequal educational experiences

3. Importance of high quality *early childhood experiences* (pre-K – 4th grade) for young Black boys

4. Social emotional development and young Black male achievement – a neglected area of educational reform

5. High quality teachers are key to the social-emotional adjustment and educational achievement of young Black boys
Three unique factors shape the developmental and educational outcomes of Black children

- **Social position** based on factors such as race, gender, social class
- **Ideologies** that define, rationalize and reinforce inequality
- **Racial and class segregation**
School failure of Black boys starts early

- Black preschool boys are more likely to be expelled from preschool than are White boys (Gilliam, 2005);

- By 4\textsuperscript{th} grade Black boys in public schools score about 30 points lower on reading and math than White boys (Aratani et al., 2011);

- 1 in 3 Black boys are at risk of imprisonment during their lifetime (Children’s Defense Fund, 2009);

- Black boys have higher rates of grade failure than other groups (Liontos, 1992; The Twenty-First Century Foundation, 2005);

- Black boys account for less than 9 percent of children enrolled in U. S. elementary and secondary schools, but for over one-fifth of total school expulsions (The Twenty-First Century Foundation, 2005, p. 6).
Powerful negative perception of Black boys and males

- Poor social skills
- Angry, aggressive, prone to violence
- Insolent, disrespectful
- Poor impulse control
- Not interested in education
- Delinquent, criminal
- Sexually promiscuous
Young boys of color, behavior & schools

- Unacknowledged & unrecognized strengths

- Black boys are often labeled as ‘behavior problems’ because they act differently than White children

- Tendency to not separate the whole child from the ‘behavior problem’

- Tendency to see Black boys as ‘at risk’, ‘troublemakers’ and ‘problems’ rather than as learners, doers and thinkers

- Tendency to view Black boys as not needing emotional and social supports that other young children need

- Greater probability of special education assignment
American early education: Separate and unequal from the beginning

- White middle class children
  - Well resourced schools
  - Highly qualified teachers

- Children of color & Poor children
  - Poorly resourced schools
  - Teachers who lack subject content knowledge
  - Teachers with little knowledge of children’s families and communities
  - Aging infrastructure
Research consistently shows that high quality early childhood programs can significantly improve educational and developmental outcomes

- Perry Preschool Project
- Abecedarian Project
- Child-Parent Centers of the Chicago Public Schools
Early childhood classrooms *culturally* unequal

- Early education attempts to marginalize, even eradicate, the ancestral cultures, languages, and experiences of children from non-White working poor communities

- European American *cultural knowledge* is institutionalized
Many schools have paid little attention to the social-emotional issues involved in schools, teaching or in learning. Comer describes this as “the critical missing link in school reform” (2005, p. 757).
Young boys 3 to 8

- Mentally active, curious and inquisitive
- Developing social and peer relationships
- Developing a complex identity—gender, culture, race, social class, abilities
- Vulnerable emotionally
  - Adults play a VERY important role in children’s developing sense of self & competence
  - Violence can significantly detrimentally effect young children
- Brain development is still unfolding and is related to all developmental domains
- Physically active—need regular physical activity
Early childhood settings value certain capacities in children. Ability to:

- Separate
- Wait; sit
- Listen and respond appropriately when spoken to
- Follow routines
- Verbalize thoughts and needs
- Comply with adult instructions and directions
- Get along adequately with peers
- Self-regulate (e.g., calm themselves)
- Interact adequately with new materials, objects, play themes
- Self direct
Qualities of early education (Pre-K – 4\textsuperscript{th} grade) programs and teachers that support Black boys’ optimal developmental and educational outcomes

- All children can learn (no exceptions)
- Grounded and taught \textit{through} children’s cultures, capacities, prior experiences
- Values/accepts their languages & dialects
- All children are involved in knowledge construction
- Use multiple assessment strategies
- Parents/families as \textit{true} partners, not merely ‘involved
- Black boys developmental needs are incorporated into everyday classroom practices and pedagogy
Teachers are critical

- Professional preparation
  - Child development knowledge
- Attitudes and beliefs about Black boys
- Deep knowledge of families and communities
- Ability to develop pedagogy that meets the developmental and educational needs of boys
- Capacity to engage with parents and families
Teachers with specific knowledge and skills are critical

- Children from culturally diverse communities, poor children, and children from marginalized racial groups have better educational outcomes when teachers have knowledge and practice skills that support home culture and language (Au & Mason, 1981, 1983; Dee, 2004; Knapp & Associates, 1995; Pewewardy, 1994).
Research shows children of color and others are often evaluated differently by teachers

- Black students, especially males receive more control-directed or qualified praise from teachers, while females, especially White females, have warmer, more positive contact with teachers (Grant, 1985).

- Black students receive more negative behavioral feedback and ambivalent academic feedback than White students (Irvine, 1985).

- Teachers tend to reward Black children differently than White children, often encouraging passive behavior that does not result in greater academic achievement (Entwisle & Alexander, 1988).

- Entwisle and Alexander found that first grade teachers respond differently to African American and white children displaying the same behavior, indicating different ways of interpreting child behavior based on children’s race.
Research shows that boys of color respond effectively if teachers

- Possess the following capacities and competencies:
  - Interpersonal warmth
  - Close positive emotional expression
  - Believe that all children can learn and she/he (the teacher) is responsible for every child’s achievement
  - Set realistic, clear, age-appropriate expectations for behavior (‘warm demanders’, J. Irvine)
  - Are firm (but never harsh or cruel; do not scream or demean)
  - Feel children’s home culture and learning is a positive platform on which to build learning and teaching
  - Use children’s culture & language in teaching and learning
Research also suggests that 6 key factors can support boys of color

- School and classroom environment and climate
- A partnership between mentors, teachers, parents and school administrators that intentionally addresses the social-emotional needs of individual young boys & implements effective plans to meet them
- Consistent daily positive feedback to boys based on appropriate and on-going informal and formal assessment
- Disciplinary practices that are not-punitive, harsh, or humiliating
- Deliberate strategies that help Black boys develop positive racial, cultural and gender identities
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Q&A
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Resources From Dr. Oscar Barbarin

General socio-emotional programs not specifically designed for African American boys:

- PATHS (Mark Greenberg)
- Coping Power (John Lochman)
- Second Step (Carolyn Webster-Stratton)
- PAX (don't remember the name of the developer)

I have developed a program specifically for Teachers and Parents of African American boys p-8th Grade:
PASC (Barbarin, Promoting Academic and Social Competence)
PIP (Barbarin, Parent Involvement Project)
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