Introduction
Changing the academic and social trajectory of African-American males can appear overwhelming and, at times, impossible.

Developing and nurturing excellence in African-American male adolescents represents an educational challenge, especially as recent reports from the College Board (2006) and the Education Trust (2003) continue to reflect the dismal participation rates in this population in and matriculation through post-secondary education. Even more disturbing are statistics from the Schott Foundation for Public Education's 2004 study (Holzman, 2004), that reflect the absence of African-American males from high school graduation ceremonies across the United States, highlighting the large percentage of African-Americans who leave high school without graduating.

To reverse this trend, it is important for professionals working with African-American males to employ effective strategies designed to encourage African-American adolescent males to reach their academic and social potential. Effective strategies are dependent upon a true understanding of the problem. The objectives of this lesson include: a review of key terms; an overview of the statistical picture for African-American males in education and society; a review of additional developmental tasks encountered by African-American adolescent males, the unique challenges they face, and the basic assumptions of one highly recognized initiative related to assisting African-American males reach their academic and social potential, and finally; an in-depth overview of a comprehensive, developmental initiative whose goal is to develop and nurture both academic and social excellence in African-American male children and adolescents.

Adolescence refers to the period between childhood and adulthood, when an individual aged 10 to 18 experiences dramatic changes relative to his/her physical, cognitive, self, social, and emotional development (Dusek, 1996; Jaffe, 1998; Vernon, 2004). Because of the marked changes that occur during adolescence, researchers (Erickson, 1968; Dusek, 1996; Vernon &
Al-Mabuk, 1995; Jaffe, 1998; Kaplan, 2000; Cobb, 2001; Vernon, 2004) typically divide adolescence into two periods: early adolescence (ages 10 to 14) and mid-adolescence (ages 14 to 18).

According to Erickson (1968), developmental tasks refer to a set of physical, cognitive, self, social, and emotional benchmarks through which the individual should progress as a part of normal development; these benchmarks help describe normal adolescent behavior. Due to the dramatic changes that occur during this time period, it is important to understand them so that adult reactions to adolescent behavior or misbehavior are appropriate (Bailey, 2006). Likewise, Vernon (2004) explains:

In assessment, age-specific developmental characteristics can serve as a barometer to indicate how a child is progressing relative to normal developmental guidelines. These developmental characteristics go hand-in-hand with the successful completion of Erickson’s developmental task. Without such a barometer, parents and professionals can easily misconstrue or misdiagnose problems; with it, they have a general sense of what is ‘normal’ (p. 31).

Thus, normal adolescent behavioral growth should include those behaviors that typify the developmental tasks or benchmarks to be accomplished during a given time period.

At-risk refers to an imminent state of crisis in which many adolescents—due to a myriad of factors—find themselves. These factors include specific demographic, economic, and social changes or a combination thereof that can greatly and negatively influence the healthy development of any adolescent (McWhirter, Shepard, & Hunt-Morse, 2004). Demographically, family structure has recently seen significant changes with an increase in divorce, along with dysfunctional or single-parent families. These changes further impact the economic stability of a family; as recent statistics indicate, a higher percentage of families in the U.S. now live at or below the poverty level, thus exposing adolescents to a series of cumulative risks including poor physical health, psychological disorders, and low educational attainment (Children’s Defense Fund, 2004; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2004). Socially, at-risk status plays itself out in an increase in exposure to violent behaviors, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviors, and gang involvement (Children’s Defense Fund, 2004; Gillis, 1998; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2004).

McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter (2004) described an at risk continuum, which ranges from minimal to imminent risk. Minimal risk adolescents are those whose demographic and economic stability provide positive support and act as buffers from psychosocial and environmental stressors; this group is not invincible to problems, but is less likely to be affected by them. Remote risk adolescents are those whose demographic and economic situation have been stressed in one or more areas, creating cumulative negative effects that may impact their adolescent development. High-risk adolescents experience multiple stressors on a consistent and sometimes daily basis due to demographic and economic instability. Because many African-American families live at or below the poverty line, many African-American male adolescents have been identified as high risk (Children’s Defense Fund, 2004; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 2004).

Understanding the Problem

An Overview of the Trajectory of African-American Male Adolescents:

The economic stability or instability of any group directly correlates to the level of educational attainment achieved by that group. Given the bleak educational and social statistics for African-American males, many experts see this problem as possibly one of the worst educational and economic catastrophes to ever confront America (Jackson, 2005). Sturgeon (2005) captures the reality for African-American males stating, “When it comes to black males specifically, more receive a GED in prison than graduate from college” (p. 1).
Statistics reveal that African-American males complete college at a rate much lower than their white counterparts (Orfield et al., 2004; Ellis, 2004; Wilson, 2000). The Civil Rights Project and the Urban Institute (Orfield et al., 2004) reports that only 23% of African-American students graduate from college and a disproportionate number of those are African-American females. More specifically, NCAA Division I schools report a 35% six-year graduation rate for African-American males (Orfield et al., 2004). In terms of overall college enrollment, in 2000 only 25% of African-American males aged 18 to 24 were enrolled in a post-secondary institution (Ellis, 2004).

According to the Schott Foundation for Public Education (Holzman, 2004), only 41% of African-American male students nationally graduated with their peers; fifteen states, including South Dakota, Maine, Wisconsin, South Carolina, New York, Nebraska, Montana, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and Hawaii, only graduated between 24% to 40% of their African-American male high school population. Based on this list, it is more than apparent that the problem is not limited to one geographic region, but instead represents a national trend (Holzman, 2004).

Poor graduation rates and corresponding high dropout rates for African-American males have been linked to both academic and social problems for this group of students. Academically, African-American male students experience an achievement gap in critical areas such as reading, vocabulary, and math when compared to their white counterparts; this gap has been shown to start as early as the third grade (The Education Trust, 1999). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, African-American males in the fourth grade scored an average of 31 points lower than their white counterparts on the Grade Four Reading assessment, with a 21-point difference on the Grade Eight Reading assessment. Nationally, math scores mimic reading scores in that African-American males scored 34 points lower than their white counterparts on the Grade Four Mathematics exam, with this gap increasing to a 42-point difference by the time they were in the eighth grade (Holzman, 2004). In addition, it has been reported that 17-year-old African-American students read and do math at the same levels as 12-year-old white students (The Education Trust, 2003).

Several researchers (The Education Trust, 1999; Allen-Meares, 1999) have cited the placement of African-American adolescent males in vocational, general, and low-level educational tracks for core subjects as part of the problem. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that many receive a simplified curriculum with low academic expectations and poorer instruction from educators that are either new to education or teaching out of their field (Bailey and Bradbury-Bailey, 2007). As African-American adolescent males continue in these lower academic tracks throughout their elementary, middle, and high school careers, the achievement gap continues to widen.

For those relegated to Special Education classes, the achievement gap widens even more; this is significant given that African-American male adolescents are placed in remedial and special education classes at a rate three times that of their white counterparts and are labeled as having Specific Learning Disabilities and being Emotionally Disturbed at a much higher rate than any other population of student (Holzman, 2004; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Allen-Meares, 1999). Assignment into these classes is more often based on behavior than true academic performance, resulting in boredom and frustration for these students; this becomes apparent with the increased number of discipline referrals for this population. While African-American male adolescents represent 8.6% of students in schools nationwide, they constitute 23% of suspensions for inappropriate behavior and 22% of expulsions for consistent disruptions (Sturgeon, 2005; Holzman, 2004).

The educational picture for these African-American males varies greatly from that of their white counterparts in terms of both quality and quantity. For African-American male adolescents, the educational experience begins to deteriorate as early as the third grade, as evidenced by the lower standardized test
scores (The Education Trust, 1999) and never seems to improve. It is as if these African-American male adolescents are being seen as the basis of the problem rather than blame falling on an educational system that is failing them. As a result, they are mislabeled and placed in special education classes or lower track classes. This type of response to their educational dilemma compounds the problem by causing them to fall further behind every year, thus widening the achievement gap to several grade levels by the time they enroll in high school. The transition to high school is difficult enough, but with an achievement gap that spans several grade levels, academic frustration and failure becomes the educational reality for these students; thus, dropping out of the education process is seen as a logical alternative to graduation.

Additional Developmental Tasks for Adolescent African-American Males

Any strategy developed to nurture academic and social excellence in adolescent African-American males requires an understanding of the additional developmental tasks these students must master in order to successfully navigate adolescence. For African-American males, the challenges of adolescent development are multiplied because of historical and social factors arising from institutional and societal racism. The interaction of these factors during adolescence can result in additional developmental tasks for African-American students (Crawley and Freeman, 1993). These tasks are most directly influenced by race, ethnicity, and culture. According to Crawley and Freeman (1993), additional developmental tasks may include:

**Early School Age:**

Incorporation of racial labels into an evolving self-concept, including recognition, identification, and labeling of social inconsistencies.

**Middle School Age:**

Recognition and development of skills for negotiating multiracial environments and bicultural experiences, with each containing mixed and contradictory messages; Enhanced and deepening skills for handling social inconsistencies, e.g., racism, discrimination, and prejudice; Forging of an appropriate and healthy identity in the face of racism, discrimination, and prejudice; Fine-tuning sensitivity and judgment skills to screen out or transform negative racial/color images and messages.

**Puberty:**

A refined and healthy identity which transforms and/or transcends societal messages of inferiority, pathology, and deviance based on color, race, and/or culture; Strengthened skills for negotiating bicultural and multiracial environments (p. 18) [AU: Not sure what reference this page number refers to...].

In addition, it is not uncommon to find environmental forces converging to negatively impact the psychosocial development of African-American male adolescents (Lee & Bailey, 2006; Lee, 1996; Majors & Billson, 1992; Madhubuti, 1990). These adolescents are often confronted with extreme environmental stressors during the crucial early years of life (Lee & Bailey, 1997; Myers & King, 1980). Such stress may manifest itself in home, community, and/or school experiences and has a direct impact on the adolescent’s healthy development.

For example, it is not unusual for African-American males to reach adolescence with a basic mistrust of their environment, doubts about their abilities, and confusion about their place in the social structure. This makes developing an identity during the crucial boyhood-to-manhood transition of the adolescent years extremely problematic. Compounding this problem is the social reality that many African-American male youths may have to engage in the process of identity formation with minimal or no positive adult male role model. Significantly, identity-formation during adolescence is a process in which youths develop aspects of their personal and social identities by selecting and identifying with various role models. Given the historical, social, and economic limitations placed on black manhood in America, the range of adult African-American male role models is often severely restricted. The devel-
Developmental passage to adulthood becomes a confusing experience for many African-American male youth because the evolution of gender appropriate roles and behaviors for African-American males has often been and continues to be stifled by historical and social powerlessness by stereotypical gender images of African-American males.

By age eighteen, the sum total of these impediments to the psychosocial development of African-American male adolescents often manifests itself in negative and self-destructive attitudes, behaviors, and values among young African-American males (Cordes, 1985; Gibbs, 1988).

Challenges Confronting Adolescent African-American Males

Due to the aforementioned additional developmental tasks for adolescent African-American males, a unique set of challenges has emerged that needs to be addressed in order to ensure the development of effective strategies (Bailey, 2005). These challenges fall into three categories—personal, social, and academic—and cannot be confronted in isolation because of the impact they have on each other as well as their individual roles in the healthy development of African-American male adolescents (Bailey, 2005).

Personal challenges confronting adolescent African-American males include:

1. Developing respect for self and others
2. Establishing healthy male/female relationships
3. Fostering the respect of others
4. Defining personal goals
5. Differentiating between adult and peer roles
6. Reversing parent and child roles

Because self-respect is an essential prerequisite to all healthy relationships, it must be nurtured in order to enhance the healthy development of African-American males. For adolescent African-American males, self-respect can be greatly influenced by their interactions with both their peers and the adults in their lives.

Social challenges affecting this group include:

1. Acquiring awareness of abilities and limitations
2. Accessing positive group experiences
3. Defining social goals
4. Accessing positive cultural and recreational options
5. Accessing to socially-related resources (i.e., counseling)
6. Obtaining of high levels of social performance

Many of the social challenges faced by African-American male adolescents are closely related to their economic status. Often, a low socioeconomic status does not afford one the privilege of special trips or attending the special camps or summer programs that can greatly enhance the life experiences for those fortunate enough to participate.

Academic challenges unique to adolescent African-American males include:

1. Developing effective academic survival skills
2. Achieving access to additional academic resources
3. Defining academic goals
4. Possessing positive educational options
5. Being exposed to realistic post-secondary options
6. Obtaining high levels of academic performance
As previously mentioned, many African-American male adolescents are relegated to special education or lower track classes; as a result, the above academic challenges emerge, plague this group throughout their educational experience, and ultimately limit their earning potential.

Basic Assumptions regarding African-American Male Adolescents

From decades of experience mentoring and nurturing African-American male adolescents, several assumptions have emerged and now provide a framework for my work with adolescents in general. For many adolescent African-American males, low academic and social expectations have a part of their school and societal experience. Researchers (Bailey, 2005; Bailey & Paisley, 2004) suggest that these assumptions must be taken into consideration when developing and implementing initiatives aimed at changing the development trajectory of African-American male adolescents. Above all, African-American male adolescents, as with all adolescents, require and deserve high expectations, boundaries, and consequences. High expectations result from both an understanding of the danger of low expectations, especially important with this group, as well as a sincere desire to help them overcome the damage already done by prevailing societal low expectations should become an integral part of every academic and social activity and interaction. For many adolescent African-American males, low academic and social expectations have a part of their school and societal experience. Thus, it is necessary that boundaries with consequences provide a safe environment in which these young men can learn and grow personally, socially, and academically and represent a co-requisite of high expectations. Appropriate boundaries also provide the sense of consistency needed by all adolescents, as well as a safe environment for African-American male adolescents to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, establish goals, and measure individual and group progress toward their goals.

First, professionals and other adults working with adolescent African-American males must care about these young men in the ways they do or would about their own children. Second, sincerity and commitment are essential ingredients to establishing positive relationships with African-American male adolescents and critical components of any effective strategy when working with these young men. Equally important in nurturing the positive development of adolescents, professionals and other adults hoping to make a difference is need to understand that young African-American male adolescents, like any other young people, need and deserve unconditional love and acceptance, with accountability. With the external negative stressors associated with racism, adolescent African-American males need experience positive relationships to counter that aspect of their lives. Unconditional love and acceptance does not mean turning “a blind eye” to their mistakes and poor choices, but rather holding them accountable and helping them work through the consequences. An important ingredient in accountability is forgiveness; adolescent African-American males have a right to be unconditionally forgiven and need to be encouraged, and even taught how to forgive themselves so that they can move forward in more positive directions (Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lush and Vredevelt, 1998; Mincy, 1994, Tucker, 1999).

We must also keep in mind that every adolescent has a right to fail. However, all the consequences related to this decision to fail must be clearly explained. The belief that failure is only a second opportunity to succeed must be ingrained into their psyche. Finally, professionals and other adults must also remember that befriending African-American male adolescents is not our primary function. Rather, it is to act as caring adults who guide and direct the development of these young men; if, along the way, friendships emerge, we should consider this a bonus. Understanding these basic assumptions and allowing them to become an integral part of our framework for working with African-American male adolescents could enhance the adolescents’ educational and social experiences, thereby changing their trajectory and enhancing their potential to become actively contributing members of society.
A Comprehensive, Developmental Model

GOTM:

Initially implemented seventeen years ago, Gentlemen-on-the-Move (GOTM) was developed to counter the low academic performance of African-American high school males. It has since evolved into an initiative for students who are not reaching their academic and social potential as well as those who are not experiencing problems but want to enrich their academic and/or social performance. The purpose of Gentlemen-on-the-Move is to promote academic and social excellence for adolescent African-American males through a comprehensive, developmental initiative built on an understanding of the additional developmental tasks, unique challenges, and basic assumptions facing this population (Bailey, 2001; Bailey, 2003; Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Lee & Bailey, 2006).

This model identifies where each member is, both academically and socially, versus where they should be (based on age and academic ability), and then provides them with the skills and support necessary to reach their full potential. This is considered the transformation, which been defined as a positive change or modification in the academic and social performance of GOTM members. The transformation is unique to each student (Bailey, 2001). For some, the transformation becomes noticeable shortly after they join the group, while in others it emerges in stages over varying periods. The transformation process involves completing adolescent developmental tasks as well as dealing directly with many of the previously mentioned challenges.

GOTM is comprehensive in that it takes a all-inclusive approach toward empowering and transforming African-American male adolescents by addressing multiple aspects of their lives (school, family, and community life). In addition to focusing on academic issues, the program intentionally and directly deals with personal and social challenges that members are confronted with on a daily basis (i.e., how to appropriately respond to prejudice/racism in school and the community, how to combat peer pressure).

GOTM members participate in community service projects as a way to develop leadership skills and unity. GOTM also provides a service to members of their communities by establishing a sense of ownership and responsibility for the well-being of the community at-large. GOTM provides avenues (i.e., dances, community service projects, and forums) for its members to interact with other groups of students who are normally outside of their immediate circle of friends. The intent is to remove social and cultural barriers that exist between them and their peers from different cultures and/or backgrounds.

GOTM also enlists the support and assistance of the families. Parents are provided with a variety of opportunities to engage in the activities of the program and are required to attend monthly meetings where they discuss issues related to their son's academic and social performance. With regards to academics, workshops are held to assist parents with negotiating the educational system on their son's behalf and provide information about special programs for both the sons and families. GOTM participants and their parents receive academic counseling including: an explanation of academic levels (general, college prep, advanced placement); recommendations for appropriate course changes; extra support for academic level changes; parent-teacher conferences; standardized testing (state end-of-course tests, PSAT, SAT, and ACT; the college application process; and financial aid).

GOTM also prioritizes meeting with parents concerning discipline and consistency, therefore providing a venue for parents to address concerns beyond academics. These meetings help parents realize their strengths, as well as offer “creative” ways of dealing productively with inappropriate behavior. Parents can sometimes feel isolated as they try to balance two jobs or going back to school with raising a family; therefore, these discussions can also help them realize the universality of normal adolescent behavior and the importance of boundaries and consistently enforcing appropriate consequences. Parents are encouraged to use preventive measures relative to behavior at school by making immediate contact with teachers at the begin-
ning of the school year via email or parent-teacher con-
ferences; this helps establish an open line of communi-
cation between teachers and parents so destructive
behaviors can be addressed immediately.

**GOTM Program Components:**

**Major components of the program include the Sat-
urday Academy, intensive exam preparations**
(known as the Fall and Spring Exam Lock-in), and a
**one-week Summer Academy.** Through each of these
components, GOTM provides multiple opportunities
for African-American male adolescents to participate in
a positive group experience with their peers as they
work through the personal, social, and academic chal-
lenges confronting them. Group membership is based
on self-selection as well as referrals from school person-
nel (teachers, school counselors, and administrators).
However, over the past four years, most have come
because of recommendations from other GOTM par-
ents and/or GOTM participants.

**Saturday Academy**

The purpose of the **Saturday Academy** is to provide
academic and social enrichment through a combina-
tion of academic rotations and tutoring sessions.
The academy is held weekly throughout the school year
on a college campus. Divided into groups, GOTM par-
ticipants rotate from 8:30 until 11:45am through three
academic sessions (Reading Comprehension, Vocabu-
lary, and Math) and one group session entitled “Self-
Discovery”, followed by tutoring from 12:00 until 1:00
pm. African-American male students (K–12) are
divided into cohorts based on grade level: Elementary
(K–5); two Middle School subgroups (grades 6 to 7
and grade 8); and three High School subgroups (grade
9, grade 10, and grades 11 to 12). These cohorts are
selected based on appropriate academic and social levels
thus facilitating effective group dynamics for learning.
Occasionally, gifted seventh- and eighth-graders are
placed with the 9th grade rotation because this more
closely matches their academic and social levels. Most
cohorts range from 8 to 15 members.

Teachers or graduate students (masters and doctoral
levels) facilitate the academic rotations, with each last-
ing approximately 45 minutes. The decision to focus
on reading comprehension, vocabulary, and math dur-
during the Saturday Academy was made because these aca-
demic areas serve as “gateways” to successful post-sec-
ondary matriculation. They also represent the critical
areas of the well-documented achievement gap between
African-American students and their white counter-
parts (College Board, 2006; The Education Trust,
1999). The academic rotations provide an opportunity
for GOTM participants to work with other African-
American males in academic areas critical to bridging
the achievement gap. Teachers of these academic rota-
tions are taught student-centered learning strategies so
as to engage students in “minds-on” activities that
encourage analytical thinking skills; thus, students have
the opportunity to strengthen their academic skills as
they “discover” their own learning styles and communi-
cate their understanding of what is being taught. Dur-
ing tutoring sessions, students review study skills and
are given the opportunity to practice them in a struc-
tured environment with teachers, undergraduate and
graduate students. High school students who are more
advanced are also allowed to serve as tutors.

During the “Self-Discovery” portion of the Satur-
day Academy, group leaders (teachers and graduate
students) help GOTM participants work through
sessions that explore topics related to personal and
social challenges including social skills, anger man-
agement, leadership skills, and career exploration.
This type of group experience exposes program partici-
ants to successful role models. Finally, the Saturday
Academy creates opportunities to meet on a local col-
lege campus where GOTM participants not only receive academic assistance from college students,
(African-American males when possible, but not exclu-
sively), but also become familiar with and comfortable
being in a college setting.

**The Exam Lock-In**

The Exam Lock-In (ELI) is an overnight weekend-long
intensive exam preparation experience for high school
participants that takes place the weekend before fall and
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spring semester final exam period. Participants are locked in at one of the local partnering high schools from Friday evening until Sunday afternoon to participate in both individual and group study sessions in preparation for state end-of-course tests and final exams. The ELI incorporates a multifaceted approach to intensive exam preparation, utilizing highly structured individual, small group, and peer tutoring. The Exam Lock-In consists of sixteen 60-minute study sessions and eight 30-minute quiz sessions over the course of two nights and two days (5pm Friday to 3pm Sunday). While individual study time is allowed, the majority of the study and quiz sessions are held in small groups (3–5 per group) and directed by teachers and graduate students.

Teachers with reputations for engaging African-American students in the learning process and graduate students with experience working with this population are recruited to staff the lock-in (Ladson-Billings, 1994). This means that they are able to assist students in learning in a manner that takes into consideration their individual learning styles. Another important characteristic of these teachers is their high expectations for all students.

Summer Academy

The Summer Academy provides a positive group experience that combines travel with academic and cultural enrichment. Previous Summer Academies have included trips to Washington, D.C., Savannah and Skidaway Island, Georgia, the Tennessee Aquarium, and camping spots in the mountains of North Carolina and Georgia. Careful planning allows for structured activities throughout the course of the Summer Academy and ensures that several personal, social, and academic challenges are directly addressed. Such trips foster the opportunity for students to have definite boundaries in place that go hand-in-hand with high expectations relative to individual and group behavior.

Special Events: College Tours and Retreats

In addition to the three main components, GOTM provides additional enrichment experiences via college tours and special retreats. Encouraging their participation in college tours at historically black colleges and universities (HBCU’s), as well as traditionally white institutions allows GOTM participants to be exposed to other African-American male college students. The college tours allows program participants opportunities to shadow African-American male college students for a day, then process their experience with the group, thus allowing for a richer experience and even more growth. This is critical for those participants who will potentially be first-generation college students. This experience alone may encourage them to step outside their comfort zone and explore the possibilities available to them beyond high school.

Special retreats with both parents and teachers allows for a group experience outside of one involving only their peers. Family retreats schedule time for discussion among groups of only parents and only students; all groups are given the same topic, but initially spend time discussing the issues only with their peers. Afterwards, the whole group (parents and students) bring in the results of their discussions and share their perspectives as a whole. Retreats with teachers and students operate in a similar fashion with student and teacher groups working their way through a particular issue or topic and then coming together to share their perspectives and listen to one other’s stories.

Whether working with new or veteran teachers, the retreat provides teachers with a safe environment to challenges their attitudes and beliefs regarding African-American male adolescents. New teachers, who are often assigned the lowest level classes and/or courses outside of their areas of expertise (The Education Trust, 1999), realize the damage of low expectations, both social and academic. Teachers also have the opportunity to hear firsthand how boredom and low expectations have influenced the educational experiences of African-American male adolescents. New teachers then have the opportunity to work together as a group, with veteran teachers as mentors, to explore new strategies based on high expectations that may be used when teaching African-American male adolescents.

Veteran teachers, who often teach the more rigorous
courses in which there are only one or two African-American students, listen to young men who explain what it is like to be the only African-American male in those classes; one young man explained that he felt as if African-American male students were treated like “community service projects.” He further explained that when tests were returned and he had done quite well, it was the common practice for his teacher to announce his test scores. Did this mean she was surprised by his achievement to the point that it had to be put on public display? While he understood that this might not have been the intention of the teacher, he expressed that this was how he and others felt when isolated in advanced classes. Veteran teachers had the opportunity to hear how their interactions might have been as well as the opportunity to join a dialogue about ways to celebrate the success of African-American male students authentically.

**Conclusion**

The implementation of a developmental and comprehensive initiative such as GOTM could provide a structured, positive environment in which adolescent African-American males are provided opportunities and support that would allow them to work through additional developmental tasks as well as tackle the many challenges confronting them. For example, such a model could help these young men confront negative attitudes and misconceptions that affect their educational experience. Earlier research (Cokley, 2003; Steele, 1992; Fordham & Ogbo, 1986) suggests that African-American students limit their efforts to be successful academically for fear of being ostracized by their peers for “acting white”. A program that seeks to develop and nurture academic and social excellence could provide these young men with a different view of potential outcomes. Such a program could provide adolescent African-American males with “excuses” for reaching their academic potential that can be used to counter the peer pressure they face for being academically successful.

In an exit interview, a former GOTM participant stated, “… the program [GOTM] sort of takes the heat off of being black, male, and smart … it kind of makes it cool to be smart. When I tell my friends that I cannot hang out with them because I have to spend the weekend at the school to get ready for my exams, they don't pick at me anymore because they know that I’m in the program and the Exam Lock-In is something we do every semester.” In essence, the program has served as a buffer between program participants and criticism from their peers. GOTM participants have used the program as their “excuse” for studying rather than staying out late, attending the Saturday Academy, wearing a dress shirt and necktie to school, etc. Furthermore, they generally enjoy the program and the rewards offered for working hard and doing “the right thing”. The program has served as a buffer between program participants and criticism from their peers. In addition, the program acts as an academic support group for students who have taken the risk of accepting placement in upper-level and more rigorous courses and have resulted in GOTM participants challenging themselves academically.

Furthermore, this particular program’s positive impact may be attributed to at least three critical components of its design that are not typical of the everyday school experience for African-American male students. These components include: high expectations on the part of the adults associated with the program; teachers and tutors who understand the importance of culturally relevant practices and strategies; and a structure that intentionally utilizes small groups (a collectivist approach) in supporting academic preparation and success. In this regard, the model is also consistent with previous research (Harvey & Rauch, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lipman, 1995; Verharen, 2000) which suggests that African-American students achieve greater academic success when culturally relevant practices are utilized from a collectivist point of view as opposed to the individualistic approach that dominates the current public education system.

The first two components address the need for high expectations in initiatives that seek to change the academic experiences of African-American male adolescents. These students need to hear a consistent message regarding their educational worth and potential if they
are to overcome the low expectations that are so often characteristic of their educational experience. These types of messages need to be repeated across multiple settings and situations to overcome the cumulative, even generational, effects of low estimates of their educational potential. High expectations can also help confront the African-American adolescent males’ willingness to accept less of themselves due to messages they may be receiving in their school, home, and community environments.

The authors believe that the intentional use of small groups is a best practice for academic preparation among African-American male students (Kuykendall, 1992; Kunjufu, 1995). All of the major components of the GOTM model, including the special events, use small groups as a way to work on academics, discuss personal and social behaviors, and experience new places and events. The GOTM staff not only has high expectations for students, but the structure and design of this particular initiative provides students with the support needed to be successful. In this regard, the structure of this model helps students feel that they are part of something bigger that is committed to their success and, ultimately, their well-being.
References


References


Questions Based On This Lesson

To earn CE credits, answer the following questions on your quiz response for Volume 17 Lesson 7.

25. Adolescents whose demographic and economic stability provides them with positive support and acts as buffers from psychosocial and environmental stressors are usually placed in the __________ portion of the at-risk continuum.
   A. minimum
   B. remote
   C. high risk

26. According to the lesson, which of the following is true of the 23% of African-American students that graduate from college?
   A. a disproportionate number of them are female
   B. most of them are older than 25 years of age
   C. a high percentage of them are male
   D. only 1% pursue a higher degree

26. Which of the following poses an added challenge to the development of African-American adolescent males?
   A. racism
   B. economic instability
   C. educational background
   D. misbehavior

27. According to the lesson, reports indicate that 17-year-old African-American students have reading and mathematical abilities comparable to:
   A. middle school students in developing nations.
   B. their peers.
   C. 12-year-old white students
   D. None of the above.