

# Postmodern Openings

Postmodern Openings Journal

ISSN: 2068 – 0236 (print); ISSN: 2069 – 9387(electronic)

Covered in: Index Copernicus, Ideas RePeC, EconPapers, Socionet, Ulrich  
Pro Quest, Cabell, SSRN, Appreciative Inquiry Commons, Journalseek, Scipio,  
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## **A Case Study of Mentor-to-mentee Program to Help African American Males Graduate from High School**

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Postmodern Openings Journal, Year 2013, Volume 4, Issue 4, December, pp: 81-93

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://postmodernopenings.com/>

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Published by:

Lumen Publishing House

On behalf of:

Lumen Research Center in Social and Humanistic Sciences

# A Case Study of Mentor-to-mentee Program to Help African American Males Graduate from High School

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## Abstract

*The problem at the research site, which was one high school within a school district located in northeastern U.S., was that the dropout rate of African American high school males was very high. A mentor-to-mentee program had been implemented to help students graduate from high school at the research site. The experiences of young African American males who participated in a mentor-to-mentee program and graduated from high school had not been examined via a case study. The research questions were about the factors influencing African American males' graduation. This study was based on the critical race theory. Data were collected through in-depth semi structured interviews with 10 participants who were high school African American males and were selected using a stratified purposive sampling. Data were analyzed through content analysis and coding from which themes emerged that addressed the research questions. Findings included the mentor-to-mentee program at the research site helped high school African American males graduate. School stakeholders should use these findings to develop and implement mentoring programs that focus on graduating African American males from high school.*

## Keywords:

*mentoring, mentor, mentee, high school teachers, school administrators, mentoring programs, policy, high school learning environment, dropout rates, high school African American males*

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### **Introduction**

The research site is one high school within a school district located in a large urban city in northeastern U.S., where the majority of African American males are not meeting high school requirements to graduate. The dropout rate of these students is very high at the research site. School administrators implemented a mentor-to-mentee program to help these students graduate. The focus of this case study was on the experiences of the participants, who were African American males, who participated in the mentor-to-mentee program and graduated from high school. The participants were interviewed to understand their experiences with the mentor-to-mentee program.

### **Research Problem**

African American male students made 88% of the school population at the research site. The graduation rate of these students is about 30%. The dropout rate of these students is among the highest in the United States. School administrators implemented a mentor-to-mentee program to connect youth males (mentees) with persons who offer guidance and counseling (mentors) to help youth to graduate. The problem at the research site was that the experiences of African American males, who have graduated from high school and participated in the mentor-to-mentee program, have not been examined. Stakeholders at the research site, who are school and district administrators and high school teachers, needed research-based findings on the factors influencing African American males' graduation.

### **Significance**

The findings of this case study may help stakeholders at the research site identify the factors that help more African American males to: (a) graduate from high school, (b) participate in the mentor-to-mentee program, and (c) attend classes at the high school. School and district administrators may use the findings to not only help more African American males graduate but also to develop and implement more inclusive mentoring programs.

### **Guiding Research Questions**

The following was the question that guided this study:

RQ1. What are the factors influencing high school African American males' graduation?

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations, and Scope**

For the purpose of this qualitative case study, assumptions included: (a) all participants provided honest responses during the semi structured face-to-face interviews; (b) all participants participated in the mentor-to-mentee program; (c) the goals and objectives of the mentor-to-mentee program contributed to the graduation of the participants; and (d) the mentor-to-mentee selection process to assign a competent mentor (teacher) to a mentee (African American male) contributed to the graduation of the participants. Limitations included: (a) interview data from the participants at the research site, (b) the gender of the participants, (c) research design, (d) small research sample, (e) the depth of the participants' responses; (f) the goals and objectives of the mentor-to-mentee program designed and implemented at the research site; and (g) sampling method, which was stratified random sampling to enhance representativeness of the final sample by selecting participants who graduated and had participated in the mentoring program. Stratified random sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. This study was delimited to 10 recent high school graduates at the research site. The scope of this case study was that the participants were from one urban high school within a school district.

### **Review of the Literature**

To conduct this study, over 100 peer-reviewed academic journals and textbooks from EBSCO, ERIC, Education Research Complete, Sage, and ProQuest were reviewed. Search terms included *high school students, graduation from high school, diversity and graduation, high school dropout rates, African American males, mentoring, mentor-to-mentee programs, the factors influencing African American males' graduation, critical race theory, mentoring programs with focus on graduating African American males from high school.*

According to Bonner and Jennings (2007), mentoring programs are sometimes not organized on a large scale to handle the number of students within the district. Mentoring programs should: (a) include strategies to keep students in school (Barney-DiCianno, 2009); (b) be inclusive for all students; (c) focus on students who have not experienced school success (Howard, 2002); and (d) focus more on

students' experiences with mentoring programs (Alvarez, 2010). Successful mentoring programs depend on establishing an emotional connection between mentor and mentee (Cadima, Leal, & Burchinal, 2010; Langer, 2010) and should be evaluated (Cordova, 2009) in terms of how the presence of mentors in the lives of the mentees can effect change in areas that decrease the probability of negative trajectories such as high school dropout (Clarke, 2009) particularly of African American males (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Mentoring programs for youth may help students build supportive and trusting relationships at school (Alter, 2009) and in impoverished communities (Perkins, Borden, Villaruel, Carlton-Hug, Stone, & Keith, 2007). Mentored youth may have better attendance and be more connected to their school, schoolwork, and teachers (Sprague, 2007) because they may be supported for improving academic outcomes (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011).

Critical race theory (CRT) is: (a) a set of legal scholarship theories about racial inequality (Ladson-Billings, 2011); (b) cross-disciplinary (Hartlep, 2009); (c) regarding racism in education (Padron, 2009; Payne, 2010) that is difficult to detect (Walker, 2010); (d) about the relationship between race and the law (Patton, McEwen, Rendon, & Howard-Hamilton, 2007); (e) about creating equitable discourses (Lynn & Parker, 2006); (f) about documenting inequity or discrimination (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005); and (g) about exploring race and racism in society via storytelling (Ladson-Billings, 2011). High school teachers should engage all students (Anderson, 2007). African American males should be motivated and engaged in the learning process and school teachers and administrators should be more sensitive to some of the experiences of these students on their educational journeys (Senegal, 2011). Teachers may: (a) positively impact student learning (Cordova, 2009); (b) encourage students to actively participate in learning, schoolwork, and social life of school (Dynarski, Clarke, Cobb, Finn, Rumberger, & Smink, 2008); (c) help students at risk (Cummings, 2010); (d) serve as models of success for African American youths (Adelabu, 2008); and (e) implement mentoring programs designed for African American students to provide them with an invaluable support (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Powell & Harper, 2008).

Mentors should be role models (Dortch, 2000) and teach students right from wrong (Hart Research Associates, 2011). 100 African

American Men of America, Inc., Boy Scouts of America, and Concerned African American Men have been offering mentoring for young men throughout the U.S. (Bonner & Jennings, 2007) to provide important supplemental social and educational experiences for students during the out-of-school time, which includes after school, weekends, and summers.

### **Research Methodology**

According to Merriam (2009), a qualitative case study design can be used to hear the voices of the participants. Interviews may be used to collect rich thick descriptions from the participants to answer the research question (Creswell, 2008/2009; Seidman, 2006). Semi structured face-to-face interviews were used to elicit participant responses (Glesne, 2011) that summarize their perceptions of outcomes or experiences (Spaulding, 2008).

### **Population and Setting**

The population for this case study was African American high school males at the research site. For the sample, a stratified random purposeful sampling was used to identify participants who graduated from the high school with specific knowledge about mentor-to-mentee mentoring at the research site (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010). Potential participants who met these selection criteria were invited to participate in semi structured face-to-face interviews: (a) African American males who attended high school at the research site; (b) graduated from the high school at the research site; and (c) participated in the mentor-to-mentee mentoring program at the research site. Those students who met the selection criteria were given consent forms outlining the purpose of the study and ethical protection of the participants. Those who returned signed consent forms were invited to the interviews that were held at the school library in a private meeting room. All participants were 18 years old or older and were assigned a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

### **Data Collection**

Semi structured face-to-face interviews were used for data collection. An interview protocol was used during the interviews to (a) respond to each situation at hand, (b) the emerging worldview of the

respondents, and (c) new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 2009). Participants who agreed to participate in the study were interviewed in a comfortable educational setting during the 2012-2013 academic year. Each interview was about 1 hour and was audio taped, with permission from each interviewee, and notes were taken (Lodico et al., 2010). During each interview, a synopsis of the research study was presented to each participant (Creswell, 2008). Documenting and recording participants' responses on tape ensured that their stories were told in their own words (Merriam, 2009). A pseudonym was assigned to each interview transcript. After each interview, interview data were transcribed within 48 hours. Each participant was asked to review the interview transcript at a second interview, based on his interview responses, to offer feedback to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. The second interview was one-on-one interview, like the first interview, and about 1 hour in duration. The purpose of the second interview was member check to make sure the data collected in the first interview were accurate and correct.

### **Data Analysis**

Interview data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using open-coding and thematic analysis to identify emergent themes and patterns. Open coding was used to categorize information within this study to determine themes and patterns within data. Interview information was categorized in relevant groups with multiple relevant descriptions of mentoring programs. Each significant datum was assigned a code. All like codes were grouped together. Different categories and data were re-reviewed and re-arranged to best fit the categories. Interview data were categorized by writing labels on post-it notes and index cards. In order to determine emergent themes or patterns, data transcripts were re-read for keywords and phrases.

### **Findings**

The findings included that a mentor-to-mentee mentoring program at the research site contributed to the graduation of high school African American males. The participants (mentees) reported that during the mentoring program they established a meaningful relationship with their mentors. Mentors: (a) motivated the participants to avoid truancy and succeed academically; (b) encouraged the participants to reach their

academic goals; and (c) provided academic advices. Mentors encouraged mentees to be involved in school activities such as school sports. Mentees' involvement in sports helped them learn about sportsmanship, teamwork, and wellbeing.

Most participants reported that through the interactions with their mentors, the mentees were motivated to strive to attend college and/or university. All participants agreed that they focused on graduating because the mentors shed further light on the benefits of graduation from high school. All participants reported that mentoring programs for young African American males are needed in high schools where the relationship between the mentor and the mentee is professional in nature where the mentor is the role model who may guide the mentee to focus on graduating from high school. The majority of the participants agreed that mentors taught them how to achieve personal and academic goals and how to create equitable discourses between mentors and mentees at the high school. Some participants reported that school games such as soccer and football helped them feel integrated in the school community. Few participants reported that study groups for struggling high school students are helpful after school hours.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The findings of this case study are in line with the finding of Alvarez (2010), Alter (2009), Barney-DiCianno (2009), Bloom (2010), Bonner and Jennings (2007), Cadima et al. (2010), Langer (2010), Cordova (2009), Clarke (2009), DuBois et al. (2011), Holcomb-McCoy, (2007), Howard (2002), Perkins et al. (2007), Sprague (2007), Woodland (2008), and Woodland, Martin, Hill, and Worrell (2009). CRT applies to the setting of this study because the participants reported the need to create mentoring programs to create equitable discourses (Lynn & Parker, 2006). African American males should be motivated and engaged in the learning process and school teachers and administrators should be more sensitive to some of the experiences of these students on their educational journeys (Senegal, 2011). Mentors who are teachers may: (a) positively impact students' learning (Cordova, 2009); (b) be an example of success; (c) encourage students to actively participate in learning, schoolwork, and social life of school (Dynarski et al., 2008); (d) help African American males who are at risk (Cummings, 2010); (e) serve as role models of success for African American youths (Adelabu, 2008);



and (f) implement mentoring programs designed for African American youths to provide them with an invaluable support (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

A high school mentor-to-mentee program should be designed with the focus on making a difference in the lives of African American males. Mentoring programs should also focus on students' personal and academic needs. Mentors should be school faculty such as school teachers, counselors, coaches, and administrators with experience in helping African American males succeed in high school. Mentors should focus on how to use school sports and academic programs such as school clubs to capitalize on the cultural strengths of young African American males. Mentees need mentors at school who are good role models who know how to have advisor-to-student rather than teacher-to-student interactions. School administrators should encourage the implementation of mentoring programs at high schools and should assign competent teachers as mentors to mentees who know how to help African American males set and achieve personal and academic goals.

In conclusion, mentoring programs may help high school African American males graduate (Smith, 2011) when these programs focus on (a) strategies to keep these students in school (Barney-DiCianno, 2009); (b) inclusiveness for all students; (c) on establishing an emotional connection between mentors and mentees (Cadima et al., 2010; Langer, 2010; Zachary & Fischler, 2009). Mentors should be role models (Dortch, 2000) and teach students right from wrong (Hart Research Associates, 2011). African American high school males may benefit from communicating with their mentor. Mentoring offers alternatives to keeping African American high school males in school during school hours. African American high school males may also benefit from a positive role model to provide these students with guidance and direction. African American high school males can benefit from programs that focus on life skills.

## **Acknowledgement**

### **First Author's Information**

Peter Kiriakidis, PhD, has earned a doctorate degree in Educational Leadership in Higher Education. Peter's educational, IT, and research leadership relates to inspiration, direction, clear focus, vision, mission, and excellence. In the past 20 years, his successful administrative, consulting, training, teaching, and IT experience at the university, college, and K-12 levels has been an involved and intense one in a multicultural/diverse environment. He has expertise in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research. As a University Research Reviewer, his role is that of a content expert, research methods expert, and editor. He has been working with EdD, PhD, and DBA doctoral committees to ensure that each dissertation meets high quality standards set forth by the university.

Peter has program and project management experiences including the development and evaluation of graduate and undergraduate programs and courses for industry and institutions of education. He has conducted research for large school districts related to (a) the evaluation of the effectiveness of professional programs for teachers on student achievement as measured by standardized mandated testing, (b) the development of district-wide policies and procedures based on test scores in science, math, reading, and language arts literacy; and (c) schools and district performance of instructional practices and enhanced curricula. He has also conducted research for large graduate colleges and universities related to (a) interactions between online students and instructors, synchronous and asynchronous communication in the online learning environment, (b) the development of policies and procedures for online course delivery, and (c) enhancement of curricula.

Peter has expertise in higher education educational leadership: (a) chairing comprehensive examinations and EdD, PhD, DBA, and MA committees; (b) developing and evaluating curriculum and academic programs; and (c) teaching graduate courses in research, educational leadership in higher education, educational and information technology, online technology, e-commerce, software development, and information systems. He is a reviewer of many peer-reviewed academic national and international journals. He has presented a plethora of research studies nationally and internationally. Email: [KiriakidisPeter@yahoo.com](mailto:KiriakidisPeter@yahoo.com).

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