Atypical Case Study

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There have been many studies and research conducted concerning the identification and placement of African American students that have progressed the representation of African American in gifted programs. However, there are other short comings in this area that need attention. Recruitment of these students and retention rates needs to be addressed. There are several reasons why African American students have been poorly represented: 1) Being a minority within a minority 2) Feeling of isolation from White classmates 3) Peer pressure from African Americans students not in the gifted program 4) Feeling misunderstood by teachers that lack the ability and experience of working with multicultural students. (Ford, 1994)

African American males are often portrayed in the media as entertainers, criminals, and gifted and talented athletes. A black male has rarely received notoriety as a mathematician, scientist, or professional. Gifted, black, male students are often seen as “uncool” and “acting white”. In the African American culture, knowing the code of the street is essential. It is a rite of passage into manhood. Education is put to the back burner, and putting in the effort to attain academic excellence is a rarity. By society standards, it is far more acceptable for an African American female to excel in academics compared to the male. In a survey, many males felt that girls were more attracted to the “bad boy type”, which consists of males that were low achievers and social deviants. These young men are often great in sports, so gifted and talented males feel the need to play sports to make up for their high scores in academics. The fact that African American males are not being identified as being academically high achieving combined with the tremendous peer pressure not to achieve, plays a significant role why so few African American young males are in honors or advanced placement courses (Ford, 1995).

The emotional and academic status of African Americans is of much concern of educators and counselors. Often times African American students are at a disadvantage because they make up a large portion of students that are socially and educationally excluded. These students usually have disproportionately high rates of dropouts, special education services, and poor academic achievement. These students also face higher rates of incarceration, unemployment/underemployment, and have higher
rates of teen pregnancy. In order for these students to be successful, there has to be consistent communication with educators, families, and counselors. Often times, counselors only give these students’ academic advice. Many believe that gifted African American students do not have emotional and/or social problems. The role of the counselor is crucial to the development of the gifted African American child. The barriers between education and counseling must be bridged. Gender issues of the African American males and females and how they relate to education and social roles must be studied. Counselors are in an ideal position to make sure these students are identified and stay in the program. Counselors should be aware of the many issues that affect gifted African American students so these students will have healthy self-concepts and proper psychological growth (Young, 2007).

“Ashton” is a 14 yr. old. 8th grade student African American male student. He comes from a middle class family. His mother is a teacher in Louisiana, and the occupation of his father is unknown. In his family, there are teachers, army personnel, and entrepreneurs. He has one brother and one sister. He is a Superintendent’s Scholar. Ashton is also an athlete. He plays football and baseball. This year he was crowned Homecoming King. He has also been chosen for “Student of the Month”. Ashton would like to become a doctor. “Brain Games” is one of his favorite television shows. He joined the gifted program in 6th grade. His favorite part of the gifted program was doing arts and crafts. He enjoys school because he is able to make new friends. He doesn’t like doing too much homework. The only challenge he faces in school is remembering a lot of information in a short time frame. He likes being in advanced classes because he says “you’re ahead of everyone else.” In his spare time, he likes to spend time with family, watch movies, play basketball, and text. He doesn’t feel that he is treated any differently by his peers or his teachers because of his gifted and talented abilities.

Ashton scored advanced on the Mathematics and Language Arts section of the MCT2. His Language Arts score was a 171, and his mathematics score was 185. To be proficient on these exams requires a score of 150. Ashton has exceeded these scores by far. Compared to students on his grade level, he is extremely advanced. The student gets along well with the other students and is very friendly and charismatic. He aims to please the teacher and to do each assignment to the best of his ability. Sometimes,
“Ashton” can be talkative when he is sitting by his close friends and have outbursts that cause the class to laugh uncontrollably. However, he always completes his work in a timely manner. In the event he doesn’t, he will attempt to stay after class to finish. Every assignment must be neat and thorough. Nothing less than perfect is acceptable for Ashton; He is a model and conscientious student. Students like Ashton may feel a degree of peer pressure and isolation, because of his outstanding academic abilities. Most African American males do not fit Ashton’s profile. To further his academic abilities, Ashton should be challenged and allowed to study areas that interest him.

Ashton didn’t get into the gifted program until 6th grade. This student has had top MCT scores and impeccable grades since kindergarten. In his school district, the gifted program begins in second grade. It is quite surprising that he was not identified sooner. Research states that African American males are usually recruited much later than other students. Ashton’s situation definitely coincides with the research (Ford, 1994). Ashton is different from the average gifted male. He doesn’t try to downplay his gifted abilities. He embraces them wholeheartedly. Ashton doesn’t appear to have a disconnect with the students at all. His participation in athletics helps to keep him closer to the African American culture. Ashton’s family plays an important role in his life. His mother is very adamant with inquiring about how he is doing academically. She is a teacher, and understands how essential a solid education is. If young men with Ashton’s capabilities don’t have a strong support system, then they would be more likely to withdraw from their gifted peers in fear of “acting white” (Young, 2007). Ashton has never had any emotional or psychological problems. Therefore, his interaction with counselors has been extremely limited. The counselors have interacted in with Ashton in several whole group sessions and for placement in honor classes. Research has shown that intellectually gifted students rarely discuss or share experiences with counselors. It seems that there is an unwritten rule that “Gifted children don’t have psychological issues”. Counselors should make an effort to work with all students no matter their intellect and make no assumptions about their emotional and social well-being (Ford, 1995).

This student loves to create things with his hands and complete challenging tasks. He gets bored very easily with routine and “hum-drum” activities. The teacher should use an assessment tool such as the
Interest-A-Lyzer to determine some of his other interests. The student has shown a keen interest in the medical field. His math scores on standardized tests are phenomenal and would make him an excellent candidate for any STEM profession. The following activities would be appropriate for Ashton: 1) Math Tutor for underachieving males 2) Designer of a computer game to help students with math 3) Data Analyst of any subject matter that interest him, etc. Ashton should be allowed to job shadow various careers that interest him. It is essential that he shadows African American male professionals. This will show Ashton that it is acceptable to have gifted and talented abilities.

Ashton is a remarkable student, and any teacher would be thrilled to teach him. He’s far from the average and definitely nothing like the stereotypical black male. Ashton’s displays strengths in all subject areas. However, his mathematics abilities are beyond outstanding. He would be an asset to the STEM profession. Ashton is able to identify well with his peers due to his athletic abilities. Other gifted males that lack athletic ability, may try to downplay their gifted abilities as much as possible. The quote “In order to be a man, a boy must SEE a man” applies very much to Ashton. It is vital that he encounters professional African-American men that share his similar interests. With caring and concerned teachers, counselors, and family, students like Ashton can grow to become productive adults.
References

