HOW TO REACH AND TEACH AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN TODAY'S SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

It is inconceivable that any child will succeed in life without an education. But in the 21ˢᵗ century the question remains, just what kind of education are African Americans getting in today's schools? Research indicates that some African American students are succeeding while, unfortunately, many are failing along the way. It is as though the educational system is more suited for the dominant culture than for African Americans. This manuscript provides reflections of the American educational system and offers recommendations, via the concept REACH, for making it more appropriate for the needs of African Americans.

Keywords: Effective schools, Foundations of education, Minority students, Public schools, Teacher education.

Contribution/ Originality

This study contributes to existing literature by delineating a unique strategy which enables African American students to experience greater success in school. It builds on some of the best practices in education to form a REACH concept. Evidence suggests that if schools are appropriately structured for students, they will learn.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nation's schools are expected to improve society and the quality of life for all its citizens (Reimers, 2013). To ensure that this goal is accomplished considerable government funds are appropriated to support public school systems (Balfanz and Legters, 2004). The effectiveness of the investment is measured by such criteria as academic achievement, career opportunity, lifetime income based on the level of educational achievement, and acts of citizenship (Azzam, 2007). For many students the investment in education proves beneficial. But for a large number of African Americans the answer is not so clear cut. For them, the school dropout rate is very high; violence, especially in

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urban schools, is much too commonplace; instruction is often provided by less qualified teachers; and the school graduation rate is about 50 percent, compared to 68 percent for the general population (Orfield, 2004). A confounding report was that some teachers even judge the personal and social behaviors of minority and low-income students as more deviant than that of wealthier Anglo American children (Obiakor, 2007).

Through a review of related literature, a critical investigation was conducted on the extent to which African Americans are progressing in the educational system and reaching the established goals of being ready to learn, able to graduate, competent in subject areas, and drug free (Superfine, 2005); and being prepared for productive citizenship. A further step was taken to offer specific suggestions on how to REACH (Revisit, Enhance, Attract, Call, and Hook) and properly teach African Americans in today's schools.

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide a status report on education for African Americans across three major time periods – before 1954, after the Brown decision (1954 to 2001), and after the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001; and to offer suggestions and recommendations as to how education might be improved to meet the needs of unsuccessful African American children, particularly through a "REACH to teach" instructional strategy. The overarching premise was that a good education is the passport to a quality life and the means for making a worthy contribution to society.

1.2. Educational Struggles and Successes, Up to 1954

African Americans were basically brought to America to serve as slaves. They could not own property, initiate contracts, or legally marry and rear their children; but they could be readily punished (Du Bois, 1935; Kluger, 1977). Prior to the Civil War, slave states denied literacy for slaves, making education for African Americans almost nonexistent (Green et al., 2005). Over time there was limited teaching by lenient masters or undercover African American schools, but after the Nat Turner insurrection in Virginia, slave laws were made tougher and were more harshly enforced (Du Bois, 1935). The Thirteenth Amendment was ratified in 1865 to outlaw slavery in the United States, but it was viewed by many as more of an economic consideration than a humanitarian liberation (Kluger, 1977).

As degrading as slavery may appear, it apparently had a positive impact on African Americans; it seemed to have caused a heightened desire within them to seek a better life by means of education (Green et al., 2005). African Americans became eager learn to read and write and held in high regard the few known literate African Americans. They viewed knowledge as power and saw education as the avenue to prosperity and the prerequisite for respect; they saw education as a means for full participation in American society. Through the Freedmen's Bureau, African Americans built numerous schoolhouses. However, they often were crowded and it was necessary to operate double sessions. Because there were only a few African American teachers, many white teachers were used. A

racial mix of teachers and students was often acceptable with African Americans because it was viewed as evidence and proof of equality (Du Bois, 1935; Anderson, 1988).

In 1863 about 95% of African Americans were illiterate; this was when they launched the first great mass movement for public education for all at public expense. By 1870 nearly one-fourth of school-age ex-slaves attended public schools and by the turn of the twentieth century the majority of African Americans could read and write. Schools and colleges provided African Americans numerous learning opportunities by having adopted the New England classical liberal curriculum (Du Bois, 1935; Anderson, 1988; Brown, 2003). But they faced many challenges. Major property owners felt that education would make laborers become unhappy with farm labor; there was a critical shortage of teachers; planters tried to restrict the organization of public schools; and a tariff was required to vote, as the Fifteenth Amendment granted them the right to vote. Jim Crow laws and state Black Codes circumvented them from achieving equality and the U. S. Supreme Court in the Plessy v. Ferguson case ruled that "separate but equal" public facilities did not violate the Constitution, if the accommodations were equal; though the "equal" was never enforced or seriously regarded (Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896; Du Bois, 1935; Kluger, 1977; Anderson, 1988; Cook, 2005; Willie, 2005). However, African Americans continued their pursuit for universal common schooling and retained strong beliefs in the value of learning and self-improvement (Anderson, 1988; Green *et al.*, 2005).

Specific milestones in African American education during this first period included the founding of Howard University in 1867 (strong in medicine and law); the founding of Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in 1868 to train common school teachers; the founding of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama by Booker T. Washington in 1881, a leading school of higher learning which stressed practical application of knowledge; and in 1896, George Washington Carver began teaching at Tuskegee where he earned international reputation for his agricultural advances (Du Bois, 1935; Anderson, 1988). Publications had tremendous impact as African Americans reached significant milestones in education; they helped to spread information on their efforts, move education in the right direction, and motivate African Americans to achieve. For examples, the *Warrenton, North Carolina Gazette* printed that African Americans had great interest and deep-rooted belief in education; whereas the *People's Advocate*, *Virginia Star*, and *Christian Recorder* criticized the Hampton program as seeking to affirm the legitimacy of African American subordination and stated that though the Booker T. Washington era symbolized remarkable education achievement, gains actually deteriorated during that time (Anderson, 1990). In the early 1900s African Americans began to publish material through their own journals, newspapers, and magazines (Brown, 2003), and even general sources of publication. W.E.B. Du Bois became the first African American scholar whose work was widely published by influential national periodicals (Du Bois, 1935).

1.3. Pursuit of Equal Educational Opportunity, 1954 to 2001

After 58 years of Plessy many African Americans realized that segregation in public schools portrayed inferiority and had a negative effect on their children's education (Willie, 2005). Feeling inferior may affect ones motivation, impede educational and mental development, and deprive the

person of benefits afforded in integrated schools (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). Other factors undermining the Plessy v. Ferguson era were economic, political, and constitutional changes; the impact of World War II; and the NAACP decision in 1952 to test the constitutionality of segregated public schools (Cook, 2005).

A defining moment occurred in 1954 when the U. S. Supreme Court in the Brown v. Board of Education (BOE) case ruled that segregated public accommodations were unequal and had no place in public education (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954; Willie, 2005). The Court ruled that segregation denies African American children equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment and that education in public schools is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954; Patterson, 2002). Chief Justice Earl Warren posited that education is an essential function of state and local governments, as it is unlikely that any child will excel in life if denied the opportunity of an education (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). Inspired by the Brown decision and other forces, Congress passed landmark civil rights acts, including the Voting Rights Act of 1965 (Cook, 2005). Civil rights were extended to employment, public accommodations, education, and new realms of public activity. Brown and the civil rights act greatly influenced American history (Benjamin and Crouse, 2002) and expanded American democracy (Anderson, 1988; Balkin, 2002).

In terms of educational gain during this period, the median school year attainment and completion of four or more years of college increased for African Americans (Willie, 2005). However, questions remained about the overall educational effectiveness of Brown. Willie (2005) expressed that Brown did not fail, but some public officials failed Brown by not implementing the law. Higher education paid little attention to the Brown decision, causing the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to demand ten southern states to develop a plan for desegregation (Anderson, 1988; Minow, 2010). Some public schools were resegregated (Green et al., 2005) and wide disparities in school funding existed. Patterson (2002) wondered whether the Court or President Eisenhower could have done more to ensure compliance with Brown. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, some school children were being taught well while others, especially the poor and minorities, were struggling or dropping out and the achievement gap between the races was not fully addressed (Education., 2005). Minow (2010) urged renewed commitment to social integration. Though in the final analysis, it is important to understand that the Brown decision was not about improving reading, writing, and arithmetic skills; increasing test scores; or enhancing teaching and learning; its emphasis was equal opportunity (Anderson, 1988).

1.4. Promises of Educational Achievement, 2001 to the Present

Some educational and social gains certainly were made during the Brown era, but hardly anyone was satisfied with the overall performance of the educational system (Balkin, 2002). Two major challenges for African Americans, and many other students, were insufficient academic achievement and lack of well-prepared teachers (Riley, 1994).

Change was due, as school segregation and inequality had not been rectified (Orfield and Lee, 2004), so another defining moment occurred in 2001. President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (2002) to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice in a manner that no child would be left behind. Among the ten Titles of the Act, two are very pertinent to this manuscript: Title I is Improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged and Title II is Preparing, training, and recruiting high quality teachers and principals. Title I ensures that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards in mathematics and reading, with science eventually being included, by 2013-2014. To meet these goals, states and school districts must identify benchmarks by which to measure progress toward them and identify other interim benchmarks to specify "adequate yearly progress." Title II priorities are to have all teachers fully licensed, well trained paraprofessionals, and support for professional development. NCLB also mandated implementation of a scientifically validated curriculum, which was the first time the federal government publicly required teachers and/or school districts to use validated curriculum (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002).

To date, reports on the education of youths are mixed. NCLB analysts claim a favorable Nation's Report Card – that select reading and math scores for African Americans are at all-time highs, the achievement gaps in reading and math between White and African American 9-year-olds are at all-time lows, and academic progress in urban schools has outpaced national gains (Education., 2005). Very recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data showed significant increases in math achievement of 4th graders, concentrated among African American and Hispanic students and those eligible for subsidized lunch; smaller positive effects on 8th-grade math achievement; and no impact on reading achievement among 4th or 8th graders (Dee and Jacob, 2010; 2011). Other sources paint a bleak picture – stating that Africans Americans are still disproportionately suspended and expelled from school and dropping out of school at extraordinarily high rates (Balfanz and Legters, 2004). NCLB has been criticized for reasons such as lack of funding, overemphasis on testing, and inconsistency in standards at the federal, state, and local levels (Howard and Reynolds, 2008).

2. MEASURES OF A QUALITY EDUCATION

Moving from slavery, to Plessy, to Brown, to NCLB; the overarching question is: What is expected of America's educational system (Hardarson, 2012) and how successful is it? It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of education because some of its impact is revealed in short term, for example, ex-slaves' 95 percent illiteracy rate in 1860 dropped to 70 percent in 1880, and to 30 percent by 1910 (Anderson, 1988); some of it is revealed in long term, for example, 50 years after the Brown case schools are becoming increasingly segregated and unequal (Orfield and Lee, 2004); and some of its purpose is open-ended and cannot be adequately described (Hardarson, 2012). In an inductive manner, one may view the effectiveness of education for African Americans in terms of what they are denied and that what they are denied is what it takes to provide quality education. Before Brown, African Americans struggled for equal educational opportunity, adequate educational resources, equity in

construction and maintenance of school property, and political enfranchisement. These matters were so paramount that African American communities across the south built an alternative system of universal education (Anderson, 1988). So what are the measures of a quality education? A short list can be prepared by turning the above negatives into positive factors. The input measures would include equal educational opportunity for all children, adequate educational resources (Riley, 1994), appropriately designed and maintained facilities, and political support. There are also outcome measures of a quality education, if it is viewed as a process of changing learners' behavior patterns (Hardarson, 2012). For example, scores on schools are maintained and used as a housing marketing factor. However, housing is a major factor leading to segregation of schools. Whites with school-age children tend not to move into neighborhoods that do not have integrated or White schools. Integrated schools often cause families to stay in the community, make a long-term investment in the community, and use public schools (Orfield, 1997). Other outcome measures may include level of academic achievement, occupational orientation, and career preparation. Also, there are bottom-line measures of education as contained in Goals 2000: children being prepared for learning, graduation rate of 90%, all being literate, absence of drugs, etc., well-educated teachers, and parental involvement (Campbell, 2003). United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) measures child well-being in six categories: material well-being, health and safety, education, peer and family relationships, behaviors and risks, and subjective sense of well-being. The three components representing the education measure are school achievement at age 15, percentage of children who continue in education beyond the compulsory level, and quality of the school-to-work transition. On education, among 21 industrialized nations, the United States ranked in the middle (Azzam, 2007).

No school ever provided quality education to students who dropped out. Schools must enhance their capacity to attract, retain, and graduate African Americans (Balfanz and Legters, 2004). Based on related literature and the author's engagement in the profession, Table 1 puts in perspective the indicators of effective vs. ineffective schools for African Americans. Certain common features of good schools for all children are leadership, safety, appropriate curriculum, parent participation, student achievement, and personnel development (Campbell, 2003). Because of uniqueness in nature and background, special provisions are needed by African Americans for maximum engagement and success in the educational process. Effective schools for Blacks are those that discover their unique, but often hidden potential; capitalize on their rich culture; realize that their background does not determine what they can accomplish; embrace their different learning styles; engage the "village" in their education; appreciate and acknowledge success or successive approximations; and make education a seamless and facilitative process throughout school and life (Green *et al.*, 2005). When these things happen, education takes hold and is embraced, supported, and realized by African Americans. Schools that do not meet these standards for Blacks will generally have poor attendance, behavior problems, course failures, and high dropout rates. Some common manifested behaviors and attitudes of failing schools are limited incorporation of students' culture in their education, low expectations, criticism about their character, weak and inappropriate curriculum, little emphasis on graduation, alienation of

parents and the community, and high rates of violence and criminal activity (Orfield, 1997; Kusimo, 1999; Balfanz and Legters, 2004; Elmore, 2004).

Table-1. Indicators of Effective vs. Ineffective Schools for African American Children

2.1. Effective Schools for African American Children Most Often

(In addition to affording strong leadership, safe environment, defined curriculum, parental involvement, monitoring of student progress, and professional development)

- Get to know each child as a person with unique potential; show empathy, respect, and understanding of strengths and weaknesses (2, 8);

- Adorn the richness of each culture and how it makes America a great society; value unique differences (8);

- Realize that where a child is born does not determine where she can go in life; differences are not deficits, empower students and parents (7, 8, 10, 11);

- Capitalize on students' particular learning styles; use multiple instructional strategies (6, 8);

- Involve the community in educating children: parents, business, health care, etc.; use available resources, develop authentic partnerships (3, 7, 8);

- Value success, study reasons for any failures, and plan for future perfection; promote academic productivity and appropriate social behavior (3, 8); and

- Make school seamless: facilitate students through school, college, work, and life; strengthen these connections, help students continue to grow (2, 8, 11).

2.2. Ineffective Schools for African American Children too often

(On top of having poor attendance, misbehavior, and course failures)

- Take no/little time to learn about and use students' background in their education; disregard cultural matters (5, 8);

- Think that nothing good can come out of the hood or diverse circumstances; devastating prejudice exists (8);

- Destructively criticize what the children wear, how they walk, or how they talk; show stereotyped cultural attitudes (1, 7);

- Water-down the curriculum, thinking that this is what the students want; lack positive learning environment, rigorous curriculum, novel ideas (3, 5, 7);

- Care less about low graduation rates, actualizing the self-fulfilling prophesy; have low teacher expectations, high special education referrals, under qualified teachers, crowded schools, inadequate learning materials, and exclude stakeholders (2, 5, 7);

- Neither seek nor accept community involvement in the educational process; lack input from parents and others (8); and

- Read about or see on T.V. that their dropouts committed acts of violence or crime; experience despair, ill health, unemployment, engage in crime (2, 9).

(Campbell, 2003; Balfanz and Legters, 2004; Anderson, 2007); (Riley, 1994; Elmore, 2004; Orfield, 2004; Green *et al.*, 2005; Obiakor, 2007; Howard and Reynolds, 2008; Hardarson, 2012; Reimers, 2013).

3. A CRITICAL VIEW OF TODAY'S EDUCATION

Realizing the measures of a quality education, the quality of today's education for African Americans may be viewed in terms of attendance, achievement, graduation, and postsecondary involvement, representing a number of objectives in Goals 2000 (Campbell, 2003). For attendance, the Nation's school dropouts are overwhelmingly minority students. More than fifty years after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, nearly half of the Nation's African American students, compared with 40 percent Latino and 11 percent white, attend high schools in which graduation is not the norm (Balfanz and Legters, 2004). African American students are suspended and expelled at nearly three times the rate of White students (Green *et al.*, 2005; Obiakor, 2007). Much of this may be caused by structural inequity and teachers' lack of cultural competence, improper attitudes, and differential behaviors toward African American students (Balfanz and Legters, 2004).

Regarding achievement, African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans, in comparison to Whites and Asian Americans, are severely underrepresented among top students on traditional measures of academic achievement such as GPA, class rank, and standardized test scores; this is across all social class segments. Despite some narrowing of the achievement gap between African Americans and Whites from the 1960s to the 1980s, the gap remains substantial and largely unexplained, across all socioeconomic levels. Some think this in part happens because intelligence is to an extent culturally defined and the tests favor the culturally dominant White group (English, 2002; Elmore, 2004; Howard and Reynolds, 2008). To say the least, the noble ideal of leaving no child behind has not yielded the desired results for diverse learners (Obiakor, 2007; Dee and Jacob, 2010).

Graduation is predicated on school attendance and achievement; so problems in these areas denote graduation problems. At the national level there are dramatic racial disparities in high school completion, with Whites and Asians graduating at much higher rates than disadvantaged minority groups. Rates for White and Asian students far exceed the national average, completing high school at rates of 75 and 77 percent, respectively. By contrast, graduation rates for American Indian, Hispanic and Black students range from just above 50 percent to only 53 percent. This constitutes a racial gap in high school graduation rate of about 25 percent. Over half (54%) of all rural African Americans aged 25 or older living in the south do not have high school diplomas. In terms of postsecondary involvement, African Americans also had the lowest proportion of college graduates (Kusimo, 1999; Elmore, 2004), only half that of their European American peers (Green *et al.*, 2005)

The ultimate question may be: Are schools enabling or disserving African Americans?

Schools may be considered enabling if they ensure that the students demonstrate adequate yearly progress on benchmarks such as standardized test scores, graduation rates, attendance and other indicators determined by the state; if they involve stakeholders like parents in the educational process; and if they meet the other criteria as required by NCLB (Howard and Reynolds, 2008). Unfortunately, serious concerns have been raised throughout this manuscript about schools' effectiveness in these areas as they pertain to African Americans. Enabling schools must also be desegregated as this offers tangible advantages for students of each racial group. Unfortunately, data show that U.S. schools are becoming more segregated in all regions (Orfield and Lee, 2004).

By contrast schools may be considered disserving to African Americans if students enroll and fail to achieve as stipulated in NCLB; if they have under qualified teachers, are deteriorating and overcrowded, have inadequate learning materials, and high personnel turnover (Howard and Reynolds, 2008). They are also disserving if they equate equal opportunity and justice, as called for in Brown, with sympathy; as contempt and pity for the intellect and character of African Americans give them a heavy cross to bear (Anderson, 2004). What African American students truly need is quality (Carter, 1995). So does the pendulum for schools swing toward enabling or disserving African Americans? Research shows that for most academic indices African American students under perform in comparison to their White peers but school curricula have slowly begun to reflect more multicultural themes and a new recognition of Black history and culture, and the percentage of all African Americans completing four years of high school has increased (Howard and Reynolds, 2008). One study reported schools are doing their job of teaching skills necessary to live and work in diverse environments (Harvard University Civil Rights Project, 2002). Perhaps the jury is still out regarding a definitive decision as to whether American Schools are enabling or disserving African Americans. However, more evidence and work are undoubtedly needed to make education an undisputed success for all of its students.

4. PRACTICES FOR A TRULY BENEFICIAL EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

If America is ever to take pride in the quality of its educational system, it must reach and effectively teach its African American population. It is a task that requires tremendous dedication and sincerity, but by no means is it an impossible one. The system must appropriately address the issues of attendance, achievement, graduation, and postsecondary involvement. To ensure that African American students excel, educators must use the classroom as a vehicle to provide instruction that allows children to reach their fullest potential academically, emotionally, and socially (Newson, 2010). Other measures to enhance achievement for African Americans include early educational interventions; smaller high schools; increased personalized instruction and student outreach; high standards; improved teacher quality, professional development, and teacher supports; engaging school programs; and strengthened connections among high schools, colleges, and employers (Balfanz and Legters, 2004).

Practices must be put in place to ensure that each appropriate benchmark is met. If African American students attend school and achieve academically, they will graduate high school. If they graduate high school with appropriate credentials and are encouraged by school personnel and supported by their parents and the government, they will enroll in college or engage in other gainful postsecondary endeavors and become productive, contributing citizens in society. If African Americans are granted the opportunity to contribute their abilities to the fullest, America will be a truly exemplary nation. Education is a tremendous task, but the longest journey begins with one step. One possible step for African Americans may be the REACH instructional strategy which impacts many of the issues and concerns raised throughout this manuscript.

5. THE REACH PARADIGM

The major thrust of this manuscript was to provide a perspective for moving toward a truly enabling educational system for African Americans. Provided here is the REACH paradigm which builds on some ideals that worked in the past to form an educational foundation for African Americans, then moves forward to the point where African Americans need to be today. The paradigm is designed to incorporate principles and practices for sound teaching as advanced in the literature and derived from experience of the author. It especially aims at teaching in grade school but is also applicable for college teaching. The strategy is illustrated via the acronym REACH, which is delineated as follows:

- **R – Revisit the past**: Schools must understand and capitalize upon the history of education for African Americans. During the period 1860 to 1954, African Americans were motivated to seek, sacrifice, persevere, and succeed in attaining an education and refused to accept defeat because they saw education as means for a better life (Du Bois, 1935; Kluger, 1977; Anderson, 1988); and parents were determined that their children would learn (Green *et al.*, 2005). Many of the things which made boys into men then can do the same now (Harvard University Civil Rights Project, 2002; Elmore, 2004). Revisiting and capitalizing upon the history of education for African Americans would likely enhance their attendance, achievement, graduation, and probability of earning a college degree.

- **E – Enhance the curriculum**: High standards are not beyond the grasp of African Americans. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries they adopted the New England classical curriculum, which was quite advanced (Anderson, 1988). Du Bois (1935) believed that if African American education during Reconstruction had been sustained, today they would be on a level equal to Denmark in literacy. However, the curriculum should be culturally appropriate (Green *et al.*, 2005), reflecting what African Americans live and what they aspire to become and then proceed to emphasize what society needs and demands; it should incorporate early interventions rather than waiting for students to fail (Green *et al.*, 2005); it should differentiate instruction to accommodate various learning styles; and it should make every minute of instructional time count (Hardarson, 2012). These things coupled with appropriate instruction and resources will help close the achievement gap (Anderson, 1988; Tatum, 1997), thereby impacting school attendance, achievement, graduation, and attending college.

- **A – Attract highly qualified teachers**: Many quality teachers will not shy away from teaching African Americans because of race or socioeconomic challenges in seeking to improve achievement and equity. During Reconstruction, White teachers came from the north to educate ex-slaves (Du Bois, 1935; Anderson, 1988). However, it is important that teachers of African Americans come thoroughly prepared and enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with students from diverse circumstances. Candidates likely to be most effective teachers and principals are those who focus attention more on the actions of schools rather than demographic characteristics of students (Reeves, 2007). The teachers should create a stimulating environment, use multiple instructional strategies, challenge students to

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think, use adequate resources, build self-concepts, help each student to grow (Obiakor, 2007), have high expectations for students, and use authentic assessment measures such as curriculum-based assessment (Green *et al.*, 2005). Quality teachers will positively impact school attendance, achievement, graduation, and postsecondary involvement.

- **C – Call upon the government**: Schools must seek adequate resources from the government as it has a legal requirement and vested interest to support education for all citizens (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954; Riley, 1994; No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002). As reflected in Goals 2000, the federal government wants world-class academic and occupational skill standards, better trained teachers, new technology, school safety, and parents as equal partners; and therefore supports community and state education reform efforts (Riley, 1994). Title I provides billions of dollars to educate at-risk students (Superfine, 2005). As the government supports education, educators must ensure bountiful return on the investment. Collectively, there is a need to build grass-roots, cross-racial coalitions to foster public participation in politics and reforming the process of democracy where people of all races feel empowered to effect changes that improve conditions for everyone (Guinier and Torres, 2002). If children are indeed our future, investing in them on the national level makes sense (Azzam, 2007), as it will improve their school attendance, achievement, graduation rates, and enrollment in college.

- **H - Hook up with the African American community**: The community needs to be a tower of strength in the education of African Americans (Anderson, 1988; Willie, 2005). Today's schools need strong ties with parents and the community that display the heart, passion, and dedication that "old" schools did (Green *et al.*, 2005). Central to the mission of NCLB is assurance of academic success for all students through authentic partnerships between the school, parents and communities. Parents' involvement has significant influence on student achievement, dropout, behavioral problems, and attending college (Howard and Reynolds, 2008).

REACH has considerable possibilities for use in the field of education. For example, it could be used in recruiting teacher education candidates and hiring teachers. It could serve as a guide for interviewers to gain knowledge about candidates' attitudes, beliefs, and professional knowledge and experience. As previously stated, the quality of instruction provided by teachers and the quality of leadership provided by school principals profoundly influence student achievement (Reeves, 2007). One study on the preparation of teacher education majors reported success in using many of the tenets of the REACH paradigm. At the beginning of the course students completed a survey to inform the professor of their background, personal interest, and professional aspirations. Then from interactive dialogue, each student chose a pal for collaboration and contact in case of class absence. The instructor heavily emphasized professional competencies and class preparation and participation, frequently assessed students and gave next-meeting feedback, and was very mindful of being a culturally responsive educator. Reference was regularly made to the role of legislation, litigation, and professional groups and organizations in the American education system. Considerable study and use

were made of community resources; agency personnel were brought to the campus to augment the instruction and students were placed in outside educational settings to gain practicum experience. This manner of teaching yielded significant gain on such measures as class attendance, textbook possession, clinical/field-based experience, classroom presentation, combined course requirements, and overall grade proficiency (Gentry, 2012).

6. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

In this manuscript considerable attention was given to equity and outcomes for the American educational system. Green *et al.* (2005) posited that until there is equity in education and outcomes there can be no claim of excellence in education. African Americans' desire for quality education has been strong but education equity has remained elusive (Howard and Reynolds, 2008). During slavery they faced laws forbidding literacy; during Reconstruction they endured the power and influence of planters to restrict public schools; and later, they contended with the Plessy "separate but equal" ruling. The window of opportunity for social, educational, and economic advancement was not equally accommodating. After the Brown case, the "desegregated but white-flight" schools defeated the most endeared spirit of the litigation. With NCLB, from the very beginning, it was difficult to determine who the real intended beneficiaries were. America needs a quality educational system for all. When students' abilities are not fully developed, their potential for impacting the world in positive ways is left underdeveloped (Newson, 2010). The best efforts of the past need to be extracted and added to visionary thoughts of today to form a public education system that cannot be effectively challenged or rivaled by private or parochial schools. Cities must afford a quality of life and education that matches that in suburbs and villages. Colleges and universities must prepare educators who have a passion for working with students and in school settings that need them most. Last but not least, students need an awakening as to the importance of a good education in leading a productive life. The REACH paradigm has been offered as a strategy with potential to advance education for African Americans. Once schools REACH for African American students, they will be positioned to teach them. America must reach out and make better the educational system for African Americans. It is required for the country to live out the true meaning of its existence as etched in the Preamble to the United States Constitution. When America ensures that no child is being left behind, it will get its declaration for having a true enabling educational system for all its citizens.

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