

Using Cultural Competence to Close the Achievement Gap

by

Patrick Coggins, Ph.D., J.D., L.L.D.
Jessie Ball DuPont Endowed Chair Professor
Stetson University, Deland, Florida

&

Shawnrece D. Campbell, Ph.D.
Director, Africana Studies Program; Assistant Professor of English
Stetson University, Deland, Florida

Patrick Coggins heads the Multicultural Education Institute which he founded in 1991; he is the Distinguished Professor of Social Justice wherein he devotes his time to research and teaching cultural diversity issues; he served on the Holocaust, African American, Multicultural Education and Public School Accountability commissions for the State of Florida; he is a consultant to the National Education Association; he works on the KEYS project addressing the achievement gap; he has served as Eminent Scholar in residence for Palm Beach School District where he developed the frameworks for teaching multicultural education, African American history and culture, and Hispanic studies, and notwithstanding, he consults with schools on how to raise the test scores and close the achievement gap.

Shawnrece D. Campbell is director of the Stetson University Africana Studies Program and an Assistant Professor of English. She specializes in African American literature and culture, Gender Studies, and also has a special interest in Asian American, Hispanic American, and Native American literature and cultures. She also devotes her time to teaching and research that helps parents, educators, and staff improve the reading skills of adolescents by introducing them to methodology that focuses on gendered learning, socioeconomic status, race, and cultural relevance.

Introduction

It is clear that the number one issue for public education is finding appropriate ways to close the student achievement gap, especially as this relates to African Americans, other minorities and lower socioeconomic children in our schools. Americans of African descent have always held a strong conviction that ethnic cultures including African Americans and other minorities would be able to assimilate just like the Europeans who migrated here were able to do. This assimilationist idea greatly influenced our culture in the United States for over one hundred years (see Zangwill's play "The Melting Pot," staged in New York City in 1908..in Banks, 2003.p.3). While, as Takaki (1998) said, "ethnic cultures and communities often help individuals satisfy important human needs..." However, African American communities which lived in abject segregation and discrimination managed to help each other for the most part, the intense pain and suffering from institutional, societal, and personal racism and discrimination made it very difficult for them to really make the strides to enjoy the American dream of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in a free society (Takaki 1998).

One of the impediments to enjoying the American dream was the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision. Plessy vs. Ferguson held in 1896, that "separate is equal." The only reality was that in the segregated and separate schools that were attended by African Americans, the schools were in poor physical condition, the teaching and learning resources were lacking, the money was lacking and thus student performance was also lacking and lagging behind the predominately white population. It was in this context that the Supreme court in the Brown v. Topeka, Kansas decision in 1954 said that, "Separate was not equal" and recommended that public schools be desegregated so that all children despite race and ethnicity would be able to have access to equal education in equally equipped school environments (Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 M.S. 483, 74 S. Ct. 686, 1954).

Today, African Americans comprise over 13 % of the population or 34,000,000 people, and other minorities make up 32% of the United States of America's population and 38% of the public school population (Pratt, 2000). According to Banks (2003), by the year 2020, about 14 years from now, the White student population will comprise only 54.5% of the public schools (Banks, 2003, p.60.) Therefore, it is essential that everyone be concerned that this significant population of 45.5 % of the children from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds be given an equal opportunity to succeed in our schools (U.S. Census Report, 2003). Why?

The reality today is that all teachers will have to encounter students from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and religious backgrounds in their classrooms during their careers in teaching and education whether public or private school, urban, inner-city or suburban school settings.

Therefore, an important goal of education is to reach these diverse students and ensure that they achieve academically and socially. As Banks (2003) and Eck (2001) argue, teachers need to acquire new skills, knowledge and attitudes that will enable them to effectively relate and educate all students in multicultural and multiracial settings. After all, today's students are the leaders and workers of tomorrow. If they do not have the knowledge, competency, and social skills to run our nation—from the car mechanic to the office of the U.S. president--, what will happen to us?

Therefore, this paper argues that the key to understanding how to close the academic achievement gap for African Americans and other minority students is to focus on four aspects namely: 1) Integrating Cultural Competence into the curriculum and learning of all children; 2) Ensuring that the research supporting the teaching of Multicultural History is clearly understood; 3) Understanding the dynamics related to the fact that minority students benefit from instruction that reflects their history and culture; and 4) Understanding that Multicultural education can be taught to all children and is beneficial to all children.

Closing the achievement gap will require educators, counselors and others to think systematically about their pedagogical practices and learn from culturally relevant experiences (N.E.A., 2004). It is also important that educators a) exemplify the virtues they seek to inspire in students: curiosity, tolerance, honesty, fairness, respect for diversity, and appreciation of cultural differences and b.) examine their practice, seek to expand their repertoire, deepen their knowledge and adapt their teaching to new research and theories (NEA, 2002). For those truly committed to closing the Achievement Gap, examining their pedagogical practices and level of cultural competence is not optional according to the NEA (2004), Indicators of the Achievement GAP produces a warning for all educators. Research for the past three decades has consistently included the following results data: 1) Low Student Achievement for 1/3 or more of students especially African Americans/other ethnic students who comprise both low socioeconomic status and are among the low achievers; 2) Unclear Academic Standards; 3) Unclear academic expectations for each student; 4) No annual IEP/IAP; 5) Unclear information on what each student is expected to know and accomplish; 6) African Americans underrepresented in Honors, AP, and IB programs; 7) High Rates of Student Absenteeism; 8) No application of research showing a relationship between high absenteeism and low academic performance with High levels of unmotivated students and High degree of feelings of disconnect and positive feelings of safety; 9) High Dropout Rates which leads to High levels of individual disengagement and Lower graduation rates; 10) High Rates of teacher and staff turn over. But, also significant is the High numbers of inexperienced teachers and high number of teachers teaching out of field.

As educators push to find solutions to the achievement gap, it is essential that we explore the concepts of appreciation and tolerance. According to the National Board of Teacher Standards, effective educators and schools demonstrate an “awareness of the influence of context and culture on behavior,” and “...virtues of appreciation and respect for individual cultural, religious and racial differences as well as appreciation of cultural differences” (NTBS, 2005). For to tolerate someone or something is to recognize its existence and do nothing or very little to correct, enhance, and empower the individual to achieve her or his best potential. While appreciation is the clear demonstration that while recognizing the context that the individual finds herself or himself in, you are prepared to do something to ensure that the individual achieves her or his best and fullest potential while demonstrating substantial academic gain and achievement.

Thus it is clear that the message for teacher/educators is that it is essential to recognize and integrate examples that will enhance the cognition of the child positively while recognizing and affirmatively reinforcing the child’s culture (NEA, 2000). These authors support the perspective of Carter G. Woodson who said that “when an individual or group fails to teach or learn their culture, over a period of time their culture will be forgotten and they will be rendered nameless and *faceless*” (Woodson,1927,p27). It is for this reason that the time has come for educators to ensure that learning has cultural meaning for every child in the classroom each and every day of the week.

The African and African American History Law, Florida Statute 233.061 (1) (f) creates a fiduciary obligation and relationship on the part of all elected officials (school board members, legislators, superintendents) as well as other educators to ensure that the spirit and intent of the law is carried out. This obligation extends to those in higher education as well as we prepare the next generation of teachers and administrators to ensure that they are aware of and understand Florida Statute 233.061 (1) (f) which requires that African and African American History be infused into all courses and all grade levels from PreK-12 in Florida public schools.

The African American Community Coalition of Palm Beach, Florida requested that the Palm Beach County school board incorporate African and African American History into the curriculum used in Palm Beach County public schools. School Board member, Dr. Art Johnson, in response to the Coalition’s request, said that unless the Coalition could provide research showing the teaching of African and African American History would enhance student performance in language arts and other subject areas, he would not support their request for incorporating it into the curriculum. Thus myself (Dr. Patrick Coggins), being the Eminent Scholar in Residence for Palm Beach County, was asked by the Coalition to perform the requested research and prepare a response to Dr Johnson’s stipulation.

The information below provides the results of that research which focused on the following three premises: 1) Teaching about the achievements of African Americans enhances student literacy and achievement in schools; 2) Multicultural Education can be taught successfully to all students; 3) Minority students including African Americans benefit from the instruction of curriculum that reflects their history.

African American History and Achievements Enhances Student Achievement

Jacqueline Jordan Irvine in *Black Students and School Failure* writes, "Because the culture of Black children is different and often misunderstood, ignored or discounted, black students are likely to experience cultural discontinuity in schools"... (Irvine, 1990.P.XIX), hence the need to teach the unique history of African Americans. Carl Grant highlights this need in *Educating for Diversity* (1995). In his research, he found that "Any program aiming to increase positive interaction among racial groups must include processes, which teach people the unique histories and qualities of the ethnic groups involved," (21). The key variable in ensuring such instruction is a well informed teacher and administrator who understand how a culturally relevant curriculum enhances student learning and achievement. Thus, Irvine, (1990) and Erickson, (1987) Au and Kawakami, (1991), Asanti, (1988) all argued that their research and experiences conclude that only when teachers understand the cultural and historical background of students can they comprehend and react positively to minority students while enhancing their academic achievement. Furthermore, according to Banks (Banks, 1997, 2003, p28), "Students are more likely to master these skills when the teacher uses content that deals with significant human history and cultural events, the history and contemporary contributions of their ethnic group." Clearly the research shows that a culturally relevant curriculum empowers students to master essential reading, writing and computational skills.

Carter Woodson, in his book on the *Miseducation of the Negro* argued vigorously that his research from 1926 through the 1950's showed that the failure to teach African Americans their history has been the source of miseducation. Dr. Woodson's research can be summarized in his own words, "When a group or ethnic group fails to teach their history and culture, sooner or later that history and culture will be forgotten and the group or ethnic group will be rendered nameless and faceless." (Woodson, p.27) These views formed the basis for the Black History Week, Black History Month, Kwanzaa, and the influences, which propelled the passage of Florida Statute 233.061 (1994) whose requirements included the teaching of African and African American History to every child in Florida's public schools. Shipman's (1981) and Doll's (1992) studies support the passage of that statute as they have both reported that ethnic minority children can and will achieve academically if given appropriate instruction and a positive and supportive environment that reflects the essentials of the child's history and culture in reading, writing, mathematics and other subjects.

Bearing in mind the Carter G. Woodson's quote above, Jonathan Kosal's book, *Death at an Early Age*, argued that we are losing our children as they become apathetic about school and learning at an early age. Shipman's study supported Kosal's research, which involved a survey of over 1000 children from 1969-1975. The researchers found that: 1) disadvantaged, racially diverse, and middle class children enter school with the same level of self-esteem and abilities; 2) children from low-income homes enter school with as broad a range of abilities as those from other social-economic groups; 3) after three years of schooling, children from low-income homes experience a significant drop in self-esteem compared with their middle class peers; 4) although there is a loss of self-confidence, children from low-income and racially diverse backgrounds still feel positive at this stage rather than negative about their ability to take care of themselves (Kozol, 1991).

African American students also experience a loss of self-esteem after a few years of schooling in the "traditional" educational system. The curriculum used in these "traditional" systems simply do not have adequate information about the history and contributions of African Americans and therefore students do not see any reflection of themselves in the curriculum. They have become nameless and faceless in the materials they study. Geneva Gay (2000) in the chapter entitled "African American Culture and Contributions to American Life" in *Educating for Diversity*, in (Grant et al, 1995, p.38) argued that her research found that to preserve African American Culture will require the study of African American history as a means of enhancing the quality of life for all. The study of African and African American history, culture, and contributions to the world should be an integral part of the education of all students in all grades, subjects, and settings. It makes no difference whether students are of African, Asian, Hispanic, European, or Native American descent, or any other group ancestry. They all need to know African and African American contributions to the United States of America and the world. In fact, they need to know the history and contributions of each major ethnic group in the United States.

Why, one might ask should all students study the history and contributions of all major ethnic groups in the United States? Ronald Dolls' (1992) book Curriculum Improvement Decision Making and Process answers that question. In it, he argued that school districts cannot overlook the cultural shifts for recognizing and dealing with diversity. Those cultural shifts include (1) the increasing number of ethnic groups and women in the workplace and (2) the shear demographic increase of the ethnic population in relation to the Caucasian population. Therefore, two major curriculum objectives must be implemented in a school's curriculum: 1) fostering respect for the natural background or ethnicity of each pupil and 2) helping the pupil to function effectively within a common culture, within his or her own culture and within other cultures. According to Doll (1992, p92), "Teaching with this perspective will naturally assist in the ultimate realization of multicultural education." He further argued that such instruction must include the history, culture, and language in each unique culture such as African American, Hispanic, and other groups.

Banks (1997, 2003) also supports a multicultural curriculum as in his textbooks *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies*, he argued that curriculum reform must include the historic aspect and culture of African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other excluded groups. "Only when the canon is transformed to reflect cultural diversity will students in our schools be able to attain the knowledge and perspective needed to participate effectively in the diverse society and world of the next millennium (Banks, 1997, 2003, p28).

In addition to the above findings, The Shipman Study in 1981, dispelled the stereotypical thinking that disadvantaged students or students from minority ethnic groups were incapable of learning or unwilling to learn. The national studies of Headstart programs confirmed Shipman's study that African Americans, disadvantaged and low-income children can and will learn in an environment that positively reinforces the child's cultural characteristics. (Tiedt and Tiedt in *Multicultural Teaching*, 1995, p. 34, 35).

Multicultural Education Taught Successfully

any educators now assert that a growing body of evidence links multicultural education and improved academic learning. For example, Hale (1990) described cognitive gains achieved by children in a multicultural pre-school program was the result of integrating materials on African American culture throughout the curriculum. Zaslavsky (1988) demonstrated how elements of African and other cultural traditions could be used to teach complex mathematics concepts to inner city students (Howard, 1989). An example of a more comprehensive multicultural program is Project REACH (Respecting Ethnic and Cultural Heritage) which has gained prominence as an academic discipline-based program for middle school social studies and which now includes over

60,000 students and hundreds of teachers in twelve states. REACH infuses information on the history and culture of various groups into the regular curriculum. It is a multicultural curriculum and teacher training process, managed on a school or district wide basis, organized around four phases:

- 1.) Human Relations Skills: Students participate in activities on self-awareness, self-esteem, interpersonal communication, and understanding group dynamics.
- 2.) Cultural Self-Awareness: Students conduct research on their personal culture, family history, or community.
- 3.) Multicultural Awareness: Students study from booklets on American History from diverse points of views.
- 4.) Cross Cultural Experience: Historical and cultural information in the booklets is made personal through dialogue and exchange with students and adults from different ethnic groups. (Howard, 1989)

Barlie Forehand and Marjorie Ragosta's study reported other success stories that focused on school characteristics of effectively segregated schools. They defined effectiveness in terms of positive student achievement and race relations. Data was collected from test, questionnaires, and interviews in about 200 schools. All schools were racially mixed and represented a wide range of socioeconomic demographics and geographic conditions. (Bennett, 1999, p.26) The results identified conditions under which benefits in integrated (infused) multiethnic education were maximized among a wide variety of settings even where socioeconomic and racial differences existed among the students. The practices that enhanced student achievement and positive race relations were:

1. A multiethnic curriculum which infused the history, culture and contributions of majority and minority groups including Whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and others.
2. Open discussion of race and racial issues in the classroom.
3. Biracial work and play teams among students. (Forehand and Ragosta in Bennett, 1999, p.26-27)

Integration in the Curriculum: The Importance of Other Cultural Views

Bennett (1999) argued that because schools are patterned after the predominant culture, it is essential to integrate other cultural perspectives to break down the stereotypes about other groups. These stereotypes get in the way of raising academic achievement and positive race relations. (R.Ramos and M. Ramos, 1979, Tiedt, 1995, Bennett, 1999). According to Tiedt and Tiedt, (1995, p.85), the process of becoming a culturally responsive teacher requires three facets:

1. "Learn about your own cultural background."
- 2)"Learn about the culture of your students."
- 3)"Is the teacher at ease in integrating his/her own culture, the child's culture, and the popular culture in ways that positively reinforces the child?"

These three culturally responsive qualities cannot be realized unless each individual has a "little humility, some admitted ignorance, and a willingness to learn more about the other's culture." (Tiedt, 1995, Bennett, 1999, p.24). Acknowledging and modeling these views are essential strategies for successful implementation of new curriculum mandates such as the African American History law in Florida and creating Culturally Competent classrooms where the history and the culture of all students are fully integrated in the subject content taught each day.

Valuing Multicultural Education

The valuing of diversity in the schools is no longer merely a social goal. With the make-up of the student body changing so rapidly, school counselors, teachers and administrators realize that they are now required to learn new techniques and skills for understanding, motivating, teaching, and empowering each individual student regardless of race, gender, religion or creed. We are a nation of diverse populations and groups. The future of our society depends upon our ability to effectively talk with one another, to reach mutual understanding and to realize that in diversity there is strength. (Bennett, 1997, Banks, 1997).

Wittmer, (1992) and Banks, (1997) argued that valuing diversity and Multicultural Education is critical to American society which is characterized with over 150 established ethnic groups. Wittmer (1992) in his article “Valuing Diversity in the Schools” argued that the acronym “ASK” underscores the scopes of our commitment to valuing diversity. The “A” in ASK stands for Awareness of self and others. Self and other awareness is a must if cultural diversity is to be appreciated in our schools and elsewhere. The “S” in ASK refers to both Sensitivity and Skills. Sensitivity to others as well as new, innovative communication skills are needed by students and others if we are to learn to value diversity and intercultural communication is to improve. The “K” stands for knowledge of cultures different from our own. Culture influences feelings, thoughts, non-verbal behaviors, ideas and perceptions and “cognitive empathy” (knowledge of another’s culture is needed to improve intercultural relationships. (Wittmer, 1992)

Students of all ages can be taught to be culturally skilled. A culturally skilled individual is willing to gain cognitive knowledge about different cultures, i.e., their history, cultural values, current problems and lifestyles and how this impacts their respective worldview. This may be the most important thing we can do in becoming more effective intercultural communicators. (Wittmer, 1992)

The Benefits of Instruction and Curriculum: Reflecting Their History

“Let us put our minds together and see what life can make for our children”(Tatanka Lotanko, Sitting Bull, Lakota Sioux, 1877)

To accomplish a multicultural vision of a Utopian American society, Kevin Brown (1995) believes that there has to be a prerequisite to bring racially and ethnically diverse students together in public schools. That prerequisite includes using a multicultural curriculum—one that reflects the history and contributions of ethnic minorities to the United States and the world. Gollnick’s and Chinn’s (1994) study supports Brown’s premise because they have found that infusing a curriculum with the broad cultural perspective of each child accompanied with raised expectations and new teaching strategies resulted in economically disadvantaged African American and Hispanic students outperforming students from other social economic groups in Language Arts, Reading, Mathematics, and other subjects. A Phi Delta Kappan research study (1988-1994) of nearly 22,000 elementary, middle, and high school students of various ethnicities, also found students reaped positive personal academic benefits from the use of multicultural teaching.

Project SEED and the work of Jaime Escalante in Los Angeles and Philip Uri Treisman at Berkeley are examples of other successful programs using a multicultural curriculum. The research has clearly shown that using teaching instruction that is culturally relevant to the students enhances their academic performance. This is also true of preschool education.

Academic Achievement and African American Studies

An early childhood education program, the Visions Program, aimed to facilitate the intellectual development and academic achievement of African American preschool children while strengthening their self-esteem and identity as African Americans. Children in the control group attended a high quality day care center with a highly trained staff. In addition, program participants in the two cohorts of the Visions group scored higher than control subjects on subtests of the Metropolitan Readiness Test, taken before Kindergarten entry, and the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), taken before entrance into the first grade. Visions Program participants scored significantly higher on the visual recognition and vocabulary subtests of the SAT. (See *Visions for Children: African American Early Childhood Education Program. Phase Three Evaluation* by Janice E. Hale in 1990.)

There have been progressions by a number of public school systems to develop African American immersion schools and institute African American history curricula. Immediate past president of the San Francisco Alliance of the National Association of Black School Educators, James Taylor Jr., and current president Lou Garrett, both school principals, had studied the document "A Blueprint for Action," and with the support of their constituents evolved an African-centered educational initiative which relies on "Effective School" research as a cornerstone, just like the "Blueprint." The Alliance put into action a mouth full of powerful words, "Infusing Responsibilities for Intellectual and Scholastic Excellence." Perhaps the most purposeful initiative ever undertaken to remedy Black student performance in San Francisco was better known as I.R.I.S.E. Its mission is clear, i.e. "Train teachers and principals and parents in the ways Black kids learn best; encourage your community in such a way as to see themselves as critical stakeholders in the whole enterprise."

"So far, so good." The first full year of implementation of I.R.I.S.E. (1996-97) showed success. Gladys's Frantz at Leonard Flynn elementary has weathered concerns from Latino and African American parents alike about student performance. "I.R.I.S.E. has really made a difference in the way we do business at Flynn, and parents are happy with the result." Last June, Flynn's 5th grade promotion ceremony carried an African theme with Kente cloths for every graduating child. While their numbers are small, the Latino children in the African-centered program scored higher than many African American children. Clearly, no adverse effects on other cultures seem to occur when other ethnic groups are immersed in African-centered classrooms. (See Hale and Editorial Board, 1998, the Sun Reporter).

The Paul Robeson Academy in Detroit, Michigan, a highly regarded school with a multicultural and African-centered curriculum, showed concrete evidence of African American student achievement in an environment that applies the seven (7) principles of Kwaanza each day as a part of a broad curriculum infusion of African American history, culture, and contributions. The academy has utilized an Afrocentric focus in an integrated curriculum that included teaching about Ancient African History, the Diaspora, and African American History. The curriculum integrated African American contributions in all subject areas, including Sciences, Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics and Humanities. The results include the fact that while 92% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch, 75% live in a single person head of households, and 92% live in poverty, the academic achievement showed these students exceeding the national and state averages in Math and Language Arts, including Reading and Writing. The majority of students have scored in the 75th percentile each year with over 20 per cent in the 90th percentile. Johnson, the principal, presented his results to the attendees of the African American History Summer Institute in Palm Beach in the summer of 1999. (Johnson, 1999).

There are many other research studies that show using culturally relevant instruction produces positive results. This includes the ABC Special “Blacks in White America” (1989) that documented schools in Chicago and Philadelphia that incorporated the teaching of African American history in the curriculum with positive results, i.e. increased attendance and increase in retention rates, increased academic achievement, enhanced positive self-esteem, and the creation of positive, reinforcing learning environments. All of the research in this section has clearly demonstrated that providing ethnic minority students, particularly African-American students, with a holistic education where their culture and group are placed in the center of the educational experience encourages them to take charge of their education.

Summary

This paper was intended to present a partial list of research which supported the premises that 1) Teaching about the history and achievements of African Americans enhances literacy and student achievement in schools; 2) Multicultural Education can be taught successfully to all children/students while enhancing and increasing student academic achievement; 3) Minority students, including African Americans benefit from the instruction of curriculum that reflects all of the cultures of students/children. While the research and information provided are evidence of current success in the infusion and inclusion of African American History and culture in public school curriculum, we cannot overlook the fact that in 1994, a Florida State Statute F.S. 233.061 as amended 1042(2) (g), 2002 requires that teachers faithfully teach African and African American History and contributions (Africana Studies) to the United States and world in Florida’s public schools. This over-riding policy mandate requires each school district to design and implement appropriate curriculum strategies to teach Africana Studies content.

The fact that the “Achievement Matters for All” and the “Achievement for All” documents of Palm Beach School district specifies the intent to teach Africana Studies from K-12 are further evidence that this requirement is a mandate. The School District of Palm Beach County takes the mandate seriously as part of its fiduciary responsibilities to the citizens of Palm Beach County. Dr. Joan Kowal, the Superintendent and her staff, Dr Art Johnson, School Board member, have reaffirmed their commitment to ensure that the Africana Studies mandate and other curriculum mandates such as Holocaust Education and Hispanic and Women Studies are implemented with the spirit and intent of Florida laws and regulations.

It is also important to state for the record that previous “School Boards” of the School District of Palm Beach County have affirmed the spirit, intent and District implementation plan with respect to this Florida Statute 233.061 requiring the teaching of Africana Studies (Palm Beach County Achievement for all Plan, 1998).

A final note for the reader is that the School Board of Palm Beach County accepted the essence of this research about the results that can be derived from the inclusion of information about the individual and group’s culture. The Board voted to reinstate the four days for the training of administrators and teachers about the integration of African American History and culture into the subjects taught in the curriculum. I and others spent many hours of staff development for the district staff. The end result is that after 8 years, according to Dr Mary Ann DuPont retired Assistant Superintendent, the Palm Beach County School District, has experienced a climate of positive change and all students have continued to improve their individual and group’s academic achievement.

Implications

The implications from this paper are threefold. First, the teaching of Africana Studies or for that matter the cultural studies of any minority ethnic group will not occur automatically. It will require protracted and persistent efforts on the part of advocates to educate and show the school district and educators what and how it can be done. In the case of Florida, there was a law that mandated that this instruction occur in grades K-12. Thus, the option of deciding whether to teach Africana Studies was removed as an option. Secondly, the advocates of teaching a particular content and in this case the history and contributions of Africans and African Americans, must arm themselves with the research that will support the notion that the verifiable outcome from such instruction will result in enhanced student achievement. The changing of the minds of the Palm Beach school board was not done on moral or legal grounds; rather, it was done on verifiable evidence based on research that was indisputable. This research was the single factor that persuaded the School Board to change its decision and reallocate resources and training days to ensure that appropriate staff development was provided to the administrators and the teachers of the school district. Finally, the third point is that increasing the achievement of African Americans and other ethnically and racially diverse children in public schools will only occur with the persistent and forthright advocacy of the parents and community members who can articulate their concerns to the school board and administrators. Additionally, it is essential that the community partner with the scholars in the local universities who will be able to assist them in the articulation of their positions.

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