

Workshop Agenda
May 28, 2008

Club Choice: Promoting Community Involvement and Student Leadership

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This interactive presentation is about developing the strengths of inner city urban youth. Youth should be seen as motivated, responsible, concerned citizens with rich cultural backgrounds that will make them a source of future leaders. Learn about a club formation process that can promote community involvement and teach youth important leadership skills that help them “get involved” and make a difference in their schools and communities. The presentation will include opportunities for participants to discuss their unique circumstances and how a club choice model might look in their community.

PURPOSE:

- 1) To review the characteristics of environments that support talent development in after-school programs.
- 2) To present club formation processes to promote interest, academic involvement, and literacy.
- 3) To identify opportunities for club formation in your region.

I. Introductions (5 minutes)

II. Albany City School District – Extended School Day Program (10 minutes)

- History of the Extended School Day Program in Albany
- Role of Clubs and Projects in the Extended School Day Program

III. Urban Scholars in the Extended School Day Collaboration (10 minutes)

- Programs that Work
 - ❖ Orderly and Safe
 - ❖ Motivation Involves “Ownership & Choice”
 - ❖ Project based / Inductive learning
 - ❖ Create a Climate of Giftedness: Representation, Involvement through team experiences, and Democratic Decision Making.
- Models for Club Development
 - Academic versus Athletic Clubs // Structured Voluntary Experiences
 - Enrichment Clusters
 - The Albany Approach to Youth Development
- Clubs and Projects in the Urban Scholars Program

IV. Small Group Discussions (25 minutes, see page 2 for a discussion guide)

- An Exercise in the Club Planning Process

V. Presentations (15 minutes)

Spokespersons to comment on the topic: “What our group came up with!”

VI. Summaries and general comments - an open dialogue. (10-15 minutes)

Activity

An Exercise in the Club Planning Process

**Firstly, it is important that you take a few minutes to introduce yourselves to one another (i.e. name, school, interests, etc.)

After everyone has had a chance to introduce themselves, describe a club or organization you are (or were) a part of and in which you were “involved.” We hope you can draw on this personal knowledge to identify clubs that work to increase youth involvement in their schools and communities. What are the resources (people and places) and interests of youth (needs) in your communities? Draw on this listing of resources and needs describe three possible clubs to begin in your region.

The following plan will be used to structure your discussions during this activity:

I. Each person should take a turn introducing themselves to the group. Describe a club or experience that promoted their involvement in an organization (school, community, etc). Next, appoint a time keeper, a recorder, and a spokesperson (3-5 minutes)

II. Describe the current situation regarding youth involvement in their region. E.g. What are the current levels of youth involvement in your community? What are the resources and interests of youth in your region? How are youth currently involved? Is there a need to increase youth involvement in your community? (5-7 minutes)

At the end of this section your group should have:

- 1) The current situation as seen by members of the community.
- 2) Input from each of the group members.

III. What would be a desired situation regarding youth involvement – What would youth be doing? How would they be involved? What barriers might be in the way of getting to this goal and how could they be overcome? (5-7 minutes)

At the end of this section your group should have:

- 1) A portrait of youth involvement as a desired situation.
- 2) Description of possible barriers and how to overcome them.

IV. Describe a club or organization for youth that could improve the levels of youth involvement in your schools and communities? (5 minutes)

A spokesperson will be asked to explain your group’s findings in 2-3 minutes.

V. Supplemental question - If time permits: What are the characteristics of an effective club leader? Think of what this person did or said that contributed to a successful club or program.

Club Formation Models

Enrichment Clusters (Renzulli, 1999)

Enrichment clusters are non-graded groups of students who share common interests, and who come together to pursue these interests during specially designated time blocks usually consisting of one-half day per week. There is one "golden rule" for enrichment clusters: *Everything students do in the cluster is directed toward producing a product or delivering a service for a real-world audience.* This rule forces the issue of learning only relevant content and using only authentic processes within the context of student-selected product or service development activities.

These utilize the benefits of inductive learning – they are not structured around content, objectives, and lesson plans. Rather direction is provided by three key questions:

1. What do people with an interest in this area (e.g. Film making, topology, conservation, poetry, etc.) do?
2. What knowledge, materials, and other resources do they need to do it in an excellent and authentic way?
3. In what ways can a product or service be used to have an impact on an intended audience or recipient?

The Albany Approach to Youth Development (Biggs & Colesante, 2000)

Students work together to achieve common goals through a process that leads to a set of recommendations for improving youth involvement in their schools and communities. The process involves students leading group investigations in which they evaluate the level of youth involvement, evaluate existing programs (discussing strengths and weaknesses) and then make a set of recommendations for increasing youth involvement in these communities. The product is a proposal for a youth organization with a mission statement that addresses a significant need in the community. The process requires careful planning and involvement from persons in the community to advocate for youth involvement. The general process involves youth assessing the current situation, describing a desired situation, and proposing steps to bring about change.

The following items were used for helping students create an Urban Youth Council and an Academic Freshmen Year support group (The Firm) in Albany:

- 1) What are reasons for believing that raising the levels of youth involvement in their communities will benefit youth, the organizations in their communities, and the community at-large?
- (2) How are youth presently involved in their communities? Discuss the nature of their involvement.
- (3) How would youth like to be involved in their communities? Discuss the kinds of opportunities that they would like to see made available for them?
- (4) What are the positive and negative consequences associated with each of the alternatives? Describe projected consequences and effects.
- (5) What youth organization should be created to increase levels of youth involvement?

Involvement in Academic Clubs and Perceptions of School Climate in a Rural School

Robert J. Colesante & Donald A. Biggs

Several years ago, some colleagues at our institution were discussing school shootings in Littleton, Paducah and elsewhere. We began to think about how the social atmosphere of these schools contributed to the tragedies they faced. We were concerned by the high profile events and wanted to understand students' experiences in school, celebrate what is going right, and improve what we could.

We collected over 200 comments from two schools in Upstate New York – one urban and one rural. After re-writing some for clarity and eliminating redundancies, we were left with 90 statements. These were used to create a survey of how students view various aspect of their school, which we then used to sample all students in grades 6-12. While analyzing the data, an interesting point emerged – involvement in after school experiences had a significant and important relationship to student perceptions of the school climate.

Most students (n = 493) participated in either an after-school academic club or athletic team. 131 indicated they participated in an after-school academic club. 74 indicated they participated in athletic teams. 288 indicated they participated in both while 143 did not participate in either athletic teams or academic clubs. We examined items that differentiated these students.

Students who did not participate in academic clubs perceived many elements of their school differently than those who did. Ratings for 21 of 90 items in the survey differed for these students ($p < .0005$). Those who were not involved perceived their teachers as less kind (e.g. Items 22, 28), less fair (e.g. Items 25, 61), and less available for help (e.g. 32). The principal was not perceived to be as friendly (Item 15), Guidance counselors were not as accessible (Item 13) and generally they were more likely say that the school felt like a prison (Item 62) than those who participated in academic clubs after-school.

In contrast, students who participated in athletic clubs perceived elements of their school similarly to those who did not. Only 2 of 90 items were rated differently by students who participated as compared to those who didn't participate in athletic teams ($p < .0005$). Not surprisingly, students who were in athletic teams believed they had enough opportunities to be members of sports teams (Item 14), but were less likely to think there were enough facilities for sports and athletics (Item 60).

Participation in what can be called “Structured Voluntary Experiences” has been linked to a host of positive academic and developmental outcomes. These activities are marked by sustained engagement and effort, and opportunities to build or develop skills (Larson, 2000; Vandell, Pierce & Dadisman, 2005). They are credible to youth in that they are seen to represent them and their interests accurately from the young persons point of view!

Note: The full study is available from the first author: rcolesante@siena.edu

Items rated differently by students in the school.

	Clubs	Sports
1. I like most of my classes.	X	
2. My teachers seem to be really knowledgeable about what they are teaching.	X	
9. I am getting a good education at this school.	X	
10. The technology in this school is really good.	X	
13. If I had a personal problem, I would feel comfortable going to my school counselor.	X	
14. Students have the chance to be members of a sports team if they want to be.	X	X
15. The principal is friendly toward students.	X	
17. This school gives too many chances to kids who misbehave.	X	
18. Many parents show up for concerts, assemblies, and sporting events.	X	
22. The teachers here are kind.	X	
24. There is a lot of opportunity to work in groups in class.	X	
25. Teachers don't use referrals unless a student has done something to really deserve being removed from class.	X	
27. The rules in this school are fair and reasonable.	X	
28. The teachers care more about their jobs than they do about the students.	X	
29. Students are often drunk or stoned in class.	X	
60. We have enough facilities for sports and athletics.		X
61. Teachers enforce rules consistently and fairly for all students.	X	
62. This school feels like a prison.	X	
69. There is a good choice of clubs and activities for me to join.	X	
77. It seems like teachers already have opinions about students before they meet them.	X	
90. Teachers treat all students the same, not picking favorites.	X	

Urban Sanctuaries:
Neighborhood Organizations in the Lives and Futures of Inner-City Youth

By Milbrey W. McLaughlin,
Merita A. Irby, and
Juliet Langman

Edited from chapter 5: What Matters Most? Common Traits of Wizards and their Organizations

Teachers and Program Leaders:

1) **Seeing Potential, Not Pathology** - Loving agendas and positive missions with productive and healthy purposes set successful youth leaders apart from those who aim to “control” the “youth problem” and its impact on society. Remedial program and substance abuse or other prevention efforts that label youth as delinquent or categorize them according to various pathologies or “conduct disorders,” are rooted in negative conceptions of inner-city youth. Our wizards [those who manage successful programs] avoid negative labels, especially those that mark youngsters as deficient or deviant and concentrate instead on raising expectations and providing settings where youth can gain the attitudes, confidence, and measure of expertise to attain their goals.

2) **Focusing on Youth** - The successful leaders’ commitment to youth also means that they focus on youth before organization, program, or activity. Wizards put youth’s interests first with a clearness and consistency that distinguishes them from other dedicated colleagues with a different focus. For example a talented and dedicated teacher or organizer may focus on designing the best possible tutoring program for youth which provides the academic assistance youth require. A “wizard” may manage a similar program, but will be more attentive to the non-program needs and concerns of youth which often go unnoticed. Too many people try to develop a program that fits for most kids, instead of looking at the particular kids who are in the program and developing the program for them.

3) **A Sense of Efficacy** - While countless other youth workers or policy makers stress that “it is too late for teens,” that “you have to get them when they are young,” a successful organizer or teacher has a firm conviction that they can and do make a difference in the lives of teenage youth from even the bleakest of settings. They believe in their own abilities to work with young people and they believe in the abilities of the young people to set and reach their goals.

4) **Giving Back** - Successful leaders and teachers understand that they are who they are today because someone cared about them and because of the relationships they established. They want to pass along the opportunities they received. They do not consider their work in the conventional sense. They define their vocations in substantive rather than hierarchical terms.

5) **Authenticity** - One-size-fits-all programming misses adolescents’ need to do their own thing, to feel they are pursuing interests and goals they themselves have selected. Through the daily enactment of commitment and respect, a successful leader of teacher must leave little doubt of their genuine caring for inner-city youth and of their high assessment of these adolescents’ potential. “You can’t be phony. The kids can see through you if you are really not genuine and really don’t care about them. They can completely see through it.”

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Program Characteristics:

- 1) **Safety** - Adolescent development can only take place when safety is assured. The effective youth organization finds many ways to protect its members from the trial and tribulations of inner-city life. This not only entails physical safety, but psychic harm as well. This may come from the police, the school, or the family. It may be related to racism or other forms of discrimination and prejudice.

- 2) **Listening to Youth** - This not only entails acknowledging youth's interests and needs, but also listening to them and allowing them to take part in decision making. Listening to youth, allowing them to have a major say in the organization's character and relationships, is the keystone in building youth's trust.

- 3) **Offering Opportunities** - Programs that are successful offer more than just "fun" and more than "safety." They provide meaningful opportunities for young people to show off their talents and to do important and meaningful activities that they are recognized by others in the community. It will also provide opportunities to for new and previously unimaginable experiences. This includes travel outside the boundaries of their neighborhoods, and discussion of ideas and possibilities they may not have considered previously.

- 4) **Real Responsibilities, Real Work** - Successful programs provide opportunities that are concrete, result in learning that is of value to the larger society, and have clear significance to the local community. They match the deadlines, rhythms, and demands of real work which allow youth to show they are committed, reliable and serious about an endeavor. This may demand long hours of dedicated work and good times. They also have a visible payoff that is of value to the youth and is honored by their community.

- 5) **Clear Rules and Discipline** - Contrary to many adults' expectations, inner-city youth are especially uncomfortable in anything-goes environments. They also flee settings where they see rules as rigid and unfair or where discipline seems erratic and harsh. Successful programs operate on the basis of a few rules that are based in the cultural authority of the group. Thus youth are integral parts of successful organizations' culture, part of decision making, and part of their own discipline.

- 6) **Focus on the Future** - Successful programs or classrooms do not treat education as a virtue in and of itself, but as a means to achieving a positive future. They are based on the premise that youth need tools for their own future, not just skills, but the pride and discipline to work hard to achieve goals.

DONALD A. BIGGS & ROBERT J. COLESANTE

1. GETTING IT RIGHT

Identifying the Strengths of Urban Youth and Providing Challenging Instruction for Them

INTRODUCTION

This paper is concerned with improving the academic achievement of students in two inner city middle schools. They include a high percentage of students of colour from low-income families. Both were designated as Schools in Need of Improvement because of their performance on state-wide tests of achievement. Students in these schools have been frequently described in terms of deficits; however, their gifts and talents seem to go unnoticed. Our first task was to decide how we wanted to represent them. The second task was to decide what would help them develop their gifts and talents.

We will argue that many problems in the education of inner city youth stem from issues of representation (see Biggs & Colesante, 2000; Colesante, Smith & Biggs, 1997). The powerful force of representation is that it structures how teachers talk about students and their needs, which in turn shapes the kinds of activities they develop for them (Brannon, 1991). Providing remediation and referring to students as “at-risk” or “low performing” closes off the possibility that their skills might not be the major obstacles to their academic achievement. We describe the development of a short-term program to enhance the performance of students in low performing schools serving youth from inner city, urban neighbourhoods.

REPRESENTATION AND URBAN EDUCATION

The Achievement Gap

Positive descriptions of inner city youth are few and far between in the popular and professional press. Still, African American students have high aspirations and lots of confidence in their abilities (Mickelson, 1990; Stevenson, Chen & Uttal, 1990). Moreover, their parents value education as much or more than parents of children from other ethnic groups and they tend to have the right mixture of warmth, responsiveness and demandingness to promote success in school (Dornbusch, Ritter, Liederman, Roberts & Fralieg, 1987; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

Students who attend inner city schools are often described as having skill deficits in reading and math. These are widely known and represented as an

“achievement gap” in professional journals (Ceci, & Papierno, 2005; Lee, 2002). The achievement gap has been described as real and having serious social, political, and economic consequences (Singham, 1998). The National Governor’s Association considers it to be one of the most pressing educational challenges facing state governments (NGA, 2007). However, it has also become part of the “ordinary knowledge” of schooling in the United States. The term produces more than 11 million citations on Google (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Names and labels associated with “the achievement gap” have become reified as descriptors of minority and low income students in American schools. Names which describe these youth as “low achieving,” “at risk,” or “disadvantaged” appear straightforward and obvious because they reflect the common sense knowledge of schooling, which is assumed to be true and not often questioned (see Bruner, 1996).

If teachers accept whole heartedly the idea of an achievement gap to represent the educational needs of minority and disadvantaged youth, they are apt to view high educational aspirations as unrealistic. We remind ourselves of the story that Malcolm X told about a teacher, Mr. Ostroski, who responded to his plans about becoming a lawyer. The teacher kind of half smiled and said, “Malcolm, one of life’s needs is for us to be realistic” (p. 43).

If reality is defined as the “way things are,” students like Malcolm are not supposed to have educational dreams or take them seriously. This story gives us some possible insight into understanding the reasons that minority and disadvantaged students are under-represented in gifted and talented classes and have less information about college and career opportunities than their counterparts.

Evidence from a variety of studies suggests that differences in achievement between ethnic and income groups are likely to reflect differences in the quality of students’ prior educational experiences (Hilliard & Amankwatia, 2003; Kozol, 1991, Oakes, 1985), the expectations of their teachers (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007), the quality of their schools’ academic programs (Good, & Weinstein, 1986; Pressley, Raphael, et, al., 2004; Pressley, Gaskins, Solic, & Collins, 2006), or the influence of stress due to negative stereotypes inherent in social comparisons of student achievement (Osborne, & Walker, 2006; Steele, 1997; Steele, 2003) than of their capacity to learn new information and skills.

We assume that a significant percentage of these students are apt to be underperforming because they are not challenged or they are “turned-off” by their experiences in schools (Bonner, 2000; Patton, 1992; Steele, 2003). The fact that so few poor and African American students are identified as gifted suggests that the problem in our schools may not be with the students as much as with the language and culture of their schools.

Giftedness

For us, the issue is how to help students realize their potential, rather than how to eliminate deficits in their knowledge and skills. African American students excel in

classrooms that demand higher order skills and that provide high-end learning opportunities (Hilliard & Amankwatia, 2003). Several researchers have suggested that the teaching and learning approach that works for these students is a gifted and talented strategy rather than a remedial approach (Osborne, 1999; Renzulli, 1999; Steele, 1997).

The guiding idea that informs our approach is the concept of giftedness as described by Renzulli (1999). Giftedness includes three clusters of behaviors which combine in multiple ways, and result in high quality products or services. These include above average (but not necessarily superior) achievement, high levels of creativity, and high levels of task commitment. Since all students can demonstrate these behaviors, giftedness is a way to describe programs that capitalize on student interests and increase their motivation to achieve.

Our approach recognizes giftedness that reflects high achievement in school activities. We also recognize a creative productive view of giftedness (Renzulli, 1999). Representing students in terms of a broad view of their gifts and talents led us to instructional strategies that are present in effective schools and classrooms. We built on these to develop a short-term intervention for promoting the gifts and talents of students attending low two low performing middle schools.

GULDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS FOR INNER CITY YOUTH

Effective Schools and Classrooms

The task of understanding the educational needs of minority and low income youth has been described as no big mystery. There is sufficient evidence from a variety of sources to demonstrate just how easy it is to improve the academic performance of these youth (Hilliard & Amankwatia, 2003). We also know that teachers from diverse backgrounds can be successful with low-income African American children (Ladson-Billings, 1994), and these youth excel in an instructional climate that recognizes their gifts, talents, and aspirations (Hilliard & Amankwatia, 2003; Osborne, 1999; Pressley, Raphael, et al., 2004; Reis, Gentry & Park, 1995; Steele, 2003).

- The instructional climate in effective schools and classes provides the following:
- Meaningful and demanding academic experiences that emphasize understanding.
 - Motivational experiences that promote high levels of involvement, that emphasize effort as the key ingredient in their academic performance, and that provided for school-wide as well as classroom accolades.
 - Teachers who are committed to their students, are consistently present, are sincere in their explicit interest in helping them achieve high standards of academic performance, and provide resources, constructive feedback, and encouragement.
 - A collective sense of fairness which reassures all students that they are to be judged on the basis of their performance and not on the basis of ethnic, racial, or gender stereotypes.

Gifted education strategies have been successfully extended to students in low income, culturally diverse schools that serve urban neighbourhoods. Renzulli and colleagues describe enrichment as a key element in their School-wide Enrichment Model. Enrichment is an approach to instruction that recognizes and supports the talents of all students (Reis, Gentry & Park, 1995; Renzulli, 1999; Renzulli & Reis, 1997). It includes:

- Challenge: Activities require the use of higher order thinking skills that demand understanding. They have high level content, advanced and authentic methodologies, and lead to high quality products or services for real audiences.
- Meaningfulness: Activities deal with worthwhile academic tasks so that students are achieving important goals. Students are involved in selecting topics and projects that are meaningful in their lives and their actions lead to services and products that are relevant to their personal experiences.
- Interest: Projects and tasks are the result of knowing what students want to learn and what they want to be able to do. Encouraging student interests may include the use of interest assessments and matching the outcomes to enrichment experiences that build on their existing curiosities.
- Choice: Students should feel a sense of ownership because they are consulted regarding decisions that impact the program. They explore their educational and vocational occupations and choose the kinds of products and services they will develop. They should feel supported, but not restricted in their work.
- Enjoyment: Their enrichment experiences should be fun. The instructional climate should not be so serious that students feel constrained in expressing their views and ideas.

Elements of an Intervention for Urban Youth Development

Based on our readings of research on effective classrooms and schools for minority and disadvantaged youth, we identified three elements for our intervention. The first was to provide interpersonal support through mentoring. Effective schools and classrooms include teachers who build relationships with a sense of trust so that instruction, feedback, and support would be taken seriously. They scaffold for success, providing just enough support to get students on track to solving a problem, while not solving it for them. Finally, they teach the value of hard work by rewarding effort and fostering an appreciation for learning (see Hilliard & Amankwatia, 2003; Pressley, Raphael, et al., 2004). Giving challenging work can convey respect for their potential and recognition that they are not lacking in their abilities. However, mentors and teachers should present critical feedback with statements that reflect recognition of a student's potential (Steele, 2003).

Our programs included mentors who were students in a teacher education program or volunteers from a local church. We encouraged these mentors to provide scaffolding as students worked to solve challenging problems in projects that they shaped. Scaffolding was intended to provide support, and then allow them to complete tasks on their own. Mentors also provided extensive help during tutoring sessions, including explicit instruction to improve their achievement. The

emphasis was always on developing self-respect rather than achieving more than others. The value of hard work and the importance of living up to one's own high standards were frequent discussion topics.

Delpit (2003) provides guidance for the preparation of mentors and new teachers. The first step is to believe in the children and their capabilities, humanity, physical ability, and spiritual character. Secondly, it's important that these educators "fight foolishness," particularly in rejecting scripted, low-level instruction. Instead, they need to challenge students with creative, demanding, high level material that expands their vocabulary. Thirdly, if they are to be effective in educating poor students of colour, they must learn about who these students are, and not what they assume them to be. This means that they develop relationships which encourage students to share their beliefs about education, and in particular, their educational aspirations.

The second was to provide enrichment opportunities that are meaningful, challenging and interesting, and that provide choices in an enjoyable environment. Our goal was to develop a program of enrichment. This aspect of our program was modelled on "enrichment clusters" which have been shown to be effective with minority and disadvantaged youth (see Renzulli, 1999; Reis, Gentry & Park, 1985). We developed clusters as non graded groups of students from two inner city middle schools who shared common interests, and came together during a Saturday program to pursue their interests. Students were encouraged to join these groups to maximize their potential. Participation in these experiences was represented to students as an honour and as recognition of their high aspirations.

Projects were developed in consultation with students and teachers from the inner city schools. They included both disciplinary and cross disciplinary topics, that involved faculty at the secondary level and the college level as well as experts from the community. Students had opportunities to discuss their interests and aspirations in a safe environment in which their ideas were respected and explored. These usually lasted from 3 to 5 weeks, meeting on Saturdays at a college campus. The goal was to help them develop products, services, or performances for real audiences. These were evaluated through reflections of students, parents and others with regard to the quality of the products.

The third was to provide students with opportunities to develop survival tactics for school environments that may have negative stereotypes of them. Since many of our students were African American or Latino American, we discussed what Steele called "stereotype threat" and how it can influence their educational goals and planning (Steele, 1997; 2003). We provided opportunities for them to learn more about African American and Latino/a American academics who have been successful in their pursuits. They had opportunities to interact with students and professionals who strongly identify with academic success.

They developed individual and collective plans for high school and college success. The task of improving their academic performance is presented as no big deal. It requires a willingness to commit themselves to hard work and to follow through on their plans. Success in teacher made and standardized tests was

attributed to effort that prepared them, both in terms of their content knowledge and their knowledge of test taking strategies and test formats.

Finally, students developed a talent portfolio, which included different types of information about their strengths, interests, and capacities as well as evidence of their beliefs and values. This was used in the development of their educational plans to be successful in high school and college. Ownership and responsibility for the portfolio gradually shifted from the program coordinator to the student. The ultimate goal was for the student to manage the portfolio on his or her own.

THE URBAN SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Overview

The Urban Scholars Program was initiated in 2003 as a collaborative effort of Siena College, the Albany public schools and Macedonia Baptist Church. The goal was to provide brief challenging projects for middle school students who reported an interest in attending college. Our efforts were directed toward providing gifted learning experiences that were modelled on enrichment clusters.

We created clubs and projects to help students extend their learning and promote the development of their emerging talents. Students had opportunities to select clubs and projects that encouraged their intellectual exploration and led to the creation of new products or services. Like enrichment clusters in the School-wide Enrichment Model, these clubs were groups of students and adults with common interests who worked together to create products or services in their area of interest (see Renzulli 1999, Reis, Gentry & Park, 1995). They began with general exploratory activities that introduced them to the work of professionals in a specific area of interest. They learned methods of inquiry in the discipline and how work in the area is done. Students practiced their skills and defined a problem they investigated or a service they provided. Finally, they carried out small group studies where their shared interests led to quality products and services.

Instruction was hands-on and project-based such that “children’s ideas, questions, theories, predictions, and interests are major determinants of the experiences provided and the work accomplished” (Katz & Chard, 2000, p. 5). One of their projects was titled *The Spaces We Live In: Inside and Out*. They learned to examine their communities and schools as urban designers. After learning about this field, they visited and studied spaces in their neighbourhoods to observe how their different arrangements impacted communication, identity, community, safety, and health. In teams, they developed recommendation for improving the spaces and presented these at a public meeting of the Common Council (see Colesante & Biggs, 2006 for descriptions of additional projects).

These inductive learning experiences exposed them to scientific inquiry, problem based learning, and performances in the Arts. Projects were led by instructional teams of college faculty members in Business, Science or the Arts as well as teachers and community experts. Each of the projects involved a task that students were to complete individually or in small groups.

Evaluations

Over three years, middle school students ($n = 217$) were self-selected or nominated by their schools and churches to participate in enrichment clusters. 52% ($n=113$) attended 10 or more sessions. We offered forty-three club projects in an array of academic disciplines including Physics, Engineering, Biology, Psychology, Sociology, Spanish, Dance, Music, Journalism, Theatre, and Community Service. 10 to 15 students participated in each club project, with an attendance rate from 60% to 80%. Although a formal evaluation is in progress, our present evidence, based on feedback from teachers, parents, and students, indicates that they found the program beneficial and would like to see it continue.

Responses of middle school students. Middle school participants in Urban Scholars were asked to rate aspects of the academic climate in the program (Brand, et al., 2003). We compared ratings from students in the Urban Scholars Program, with ratings of a high performing middle school (see Figure 1). There were generally fewer negative interactions and more positive interactions with peers in Urban Scholars than the comparison middle school. This was also the case with perceptions of their interactions with teachers, whom they viewed as supportive, clear in their expectations, innovative, and moderately harsh in their discipline at Urban Scholars.

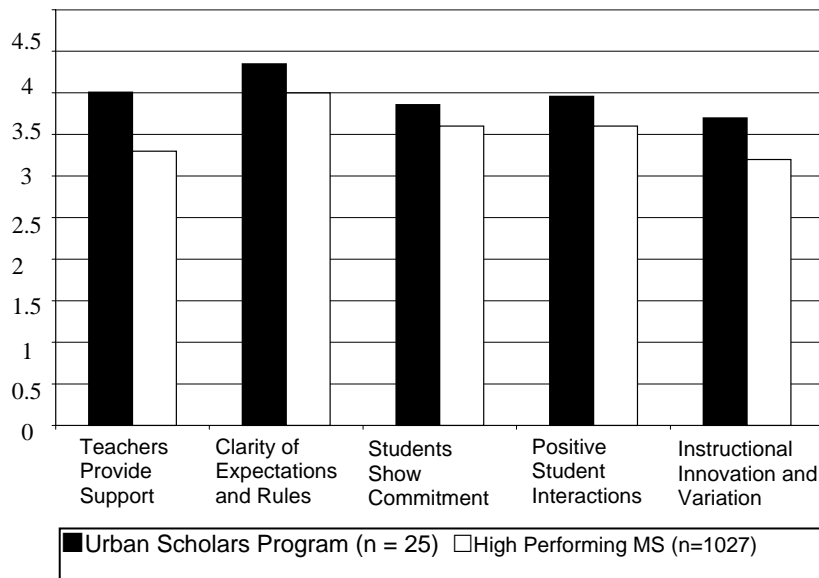


Figure 1: Student ratings of the perceived climate in urban scholars and a high performing middle school.

Responses from college interns. College interns attended the program in the 2005-2006 year to complete a field experience requirement associated with coursework in the Education Department. On average, they spent 20 hours, or approximately 3 sessions, with students. They were tutors and mentors for the urban youth and assistants to teachers during the enrichment clusters. Interns who completed their experiences in Urban Scholars rated the expertness and attractiveness of students with whom they worked. Expertness refers to perceptions of a knowledgeable person who is capable of learning new skills (e.g. skillful – unskillful, expert – inexpert). Attractiveness refers to perceptions of likeability and similarity (e.g. likeable – unlikeable; sociable – unsociable).

We asked whether the climate of Urban Scholars had a positive impact on their views of students. Ratings of interns who worked with urban scholars' students were compared with the ratings of interns who completed their experiences in the local urban middle schools (see Table 1). Interns who worked in Urban Scholars rated the expertness and attractiveness of students higher than those who worked in the students' home schools.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of ratings for the expertness and attractiveness of middle school students.

	<i>Expertness</i>		<i>Attractiveness</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Urban Scholars	15.90	3.11	22.17	3.41
Urban Middle School	13.69	3.18	21.42	3.84

Note: n=29 rated students in Urban Scholars; n=36 rated students in the local urban middle school.

These results may indicate that interns are picking up on differences between students in Urban Scholars and the general population of the middle schools from which they come. We will be looking into this with future data collection. Anecdotes from teachers suggest that students act differently in Urban Scholars than they do in their home schools. Over the years, teachers have reported that they were surprised by students who were "big trouble" in their schools, but who were active and involved while at Urban Scholars.

The ratings may also indicate differences in the climate of these settings, which impacts both the interns' ratings and the student behaviours. Interns working in the urban middle schools may be immersed in a climate, which endorses a deficit view of students. They are frequently described in terms of their negative attributes and are seldom identified in terms of their gifts and talents. However, interns working in Urban Scholars were frequently asked to look for signs of the gifts and talents of students.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In an earlier paper, we proposed that the climate of middle schools may fail to support the high educational aspirations of minority youth because educators sometimes represent them as unrealistic (Biggs & Colesante, 2000). In this paper, we consider the possible impact of representing their educational needs in terms of an “achievement gap.” We propose, instead, to focus on the development of school climates that support their gifts and talents. A major obstacle to creating such positive climate for African American and Latino youth is the presence of a shared belief in an “achievement gap.” The development of trust and the willingness of school personnel to act as mentors are particularly effective with minority youth (Steele, 1997; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996).

Rather than being concerned about the “achievement gap” between various social groups, we are concerned with the discrepancy between the positive educational beliefs and attitudes of urban, mostly African American and Latino students, and their behaviours on academic tasks. This has been referred to as the over-prediction or under achievement phenomenon (Steele & Aronson, 1995). These students have more positive beliefs about their abilities, higher levels of self-esteem and higher educational aspirations than do their White peers (Graham, 1994; Wylie, 1979). They and their parents value education as much as White or Asian students and their parents (Steinberg, Dornbusch & Brown, 1992; Stevenson, Chen & Uttal, 1990).

This paper discussed issues of representation that will impact the development of effective academic interventions for minority and disadvantaged students. The first issue concerned how to represent the needs of students. The second issue concerned how to represent instruction to promote their attendance, participation, and completion of an academic support program. We discussed issues related to instruction and curriculum design by describing a “work in progress” called the Urban Scholars Program. The thrust of this program was to provide enrichment by involving students in experiences which result in the development of original ideas, products, or artistic presentations. Learning and developmental experiences focused on students as inquirers, who apply knowledge and problem solving processes on inductive tasks. The definition of giftedness was democratic in that it included the many kinds of talents and aptitudes for advanced learning and creative productivity that exist in all schools (see Renzulli, 1999; Renzulli & Reis, 1997; Reis, Gentry & Park, 1995). Rather than labelling some students as gifted, the idea was to provide every student in the program with opportunities, resources, and encouragement to achieve his or her potential. We developed enrichment clubs which were offered for 3 to 5 consecutive weekends during the school year.

Though African American students have many qualities that would predict high academic achievement, they often underperform in school. Explanations frequently attribute the cause to deficits in their homes, schools and communities. We described a program that provided gifted education for middle school youth attending inner city schools. Though there was evidence of deficiencies in their academic skills, there was also considerable evidence of high aspirations and emerging talents. Our goal was to create a model for programs that recognize and

develop the emerging talents of all students. We used inductive, project-based experiences to foster collective norms that value hard work and excellence. Project leaders, coaches, and mentors confirmed their aspirations and helped them identify their emerging talents. They provided opportunities to explore their talents, learn methods of inquiry, and conduct investigations that resulted in products or services for real audiences.

We describe our efforts as creating a “climate of giftedness” in the program. Such a climate recognizes and celebrates the fact that students of colour who attend low performing schools also have gifts and talents. In the program, they identified their talents, talked about how to improve them, and provided rewards to each other when they used their talents to create exceptional products or services. The program provided opportunities for students to discover that they could improve their talents with practice, instruction, and a desire to learn. The environment also provided shelter from the negative effects of stereotypes that often depress their performance on academic tasks. Students learned that the quality of their work can be judged in terms of challenging and high standards, and that they can meet these high standards with support, practice, and mastery of new skills.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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