

15 Influential Articles on Fostering School Engagement of Black Students

Carter, A. R., & Hart, A. (2010). Perspectives of mentoring: The black female student-athlete. *Sport Management Review*, 13(4), 382-394.

Reveals Black female athletes' perceptions of mentors and the characteristics of their current mentors. 38 young women in 2 college institutions were participants in the study. The study shows successful Black female athletes often had 3 distinct mentors to fulfill mentorship roles in 1) career and academic support; 2) psychosocial support; and, 3) athletic support. The qualities associated with being an effective mentor included:

- being a guide - someone who guides the student towards goals or 'greater good';
- being a role model - someone who helps by example in all aspects of life;
- having relational characteristics – someone who cares and doesn't think of the student "as a job" (p. 386);
- providing constructive criticism – someone who provide honest feedback without putting the student down.

The benefits of mentorship for successful student athletes include establishing trust, realizing their dream, increasing their skills and confidence, and networking.

Douglas, T. M. O., & Arnold, N. W. (2016). Exposure in and out of school: A Black Bermudian male's successful educational journey. *Teachers College Record*, 118(6) 1-36.

The article focuses on 1 highly successful participant, Brandon, from a study of 12 Black Bermudian males. The results reveal the participant's educational success was due to factors such as: 1) exposure to healthy personal and cultural identity constructs, including positive family and school influences; 2) K-12 community-based education, including churches and sports clubs, establishing "activities to keep him out of trouble" (p. 16); and, 3) "attending college was a matter of where not if" (p. 18). Brandon had Black male role models who challenged him to do his best and shaped his ideas of success. He also credited the role and responsibility of being a father toward constructing his identity. The authors make 3 recommendations for ensuring students' success: 1) provide non-deficit community and school-based exposure, countering the view of Black students as being disadvantaged; 2) provide multigenerational academic support from teachers and mentors, helping students to forge a healthy sense of self; and, 3) provide border crossing exposure, i.e., opportunities for students to go to other places. In Brandon's case, he was able to visit and matriculate from a school in the US. The study of Brandon's success identifies as a key factor the "educational process [which] requires parents, educators, and educational institutions to expose Black males to "the best of who we/they are," and the best of who they can become" (p. 28).

Foster, M. (1997). What I learned from Catholic school. In C.P. Casanave & S.R. Schecter (Eds.), *On becoming a language educator: Personal essays on professional development* (pp. 19-27). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Narrates the growing-up and 25-year teaching life of an African-American woman and educator. Michele Foster reflects on her youth and literacy education with nuns in a Catholic school prior to entry into a liberal arts college and then an Ivy League Graduate School of Education in Massachusetts. The nuns in her preparatory school offered a rigorous college-prep curriculum, which included explicit instructional methods, memorizing spelling and vocabulary words, spending hours analyzing parts of speech, understanding grammar and using various mnemonic devices (ways to remember and recall information). Although Foster was taught by the nuns to use correct grammatical forms of French and English, the nuns were ineffectual when it came to explaining the characteristics of writing an essay; so when in college she was rarely awarded a grade above C-. When she began teaching in all-African-American urban classrooms, she first drew upon verbal traditions of the community, rather than starting with writing. She then asked students to begin to read their written work out loud, as well as that of others, with expression. “Out-loud readings introduced students at all levels to unfamiliar vocabulary, unusual sentence constructions, new discourse features, and different patterns of organization” (p. 25). Foster suggests that reading aloud helps students who speak ‘African American English’ to transform in order to conform to the conventions of Standard American English written text. However, she continues to wrestle with her ideas about teaching literacy.

Hatch, D. K. (2012). Unpacking the black box of student engagement: The need for programmatic investigation of high impact practices. *Community Research and Practice*, 36(11), 903-915.

Discusses ‘student engagement’ as a kind of black box, which needs to be pried open. Engagement has been defined as either 1) students’ cognitive and self-regulatory strategies to pursue learning tasks; or, 2) what students *do* to enhance their learning. Despite a wealth of research and praise for student engagement, where, how, and under what circumstances engagement occurs is still unknown. In order for students to succeed, behaviours related to enhancing study habits, peer involvement, interaction with faculty, time on task, and motivation are cited as beneficial. However, institutions often do not formalize these behaviours or create programs to aid students toward success in these realms. The author argues that current approaches to studying student engagement are problematic because they do not consider a variety of activities, programs, and structures in which student engagement is taking place. The author suggests studying engagement across multiple contexts, which means examining institutional programs and practices on two levels: 1) fine-grained study of program elements, and 2) a broad multi-institutional study to identify commonalities.

Ibrahim, A. (2009). Operating under erasure: Race/language/identity. In R. Kubota & A. Lin (Eds.), *Race, culture, and identities in second language education: Exploring critically engaged practice* (pp. 176-194). New York: Routledge.

Explores how race and racialization is connected to identity and second language acquisition, looking at a group of French-speaking immigrant and refugee African youth (grades 7 to 13) in southwestern Ontario. The author conducted an ethnographic study by hanging out with the participants in their schools, social venues, and homes for 6 months. He attended parties, plays, basketball games, and graduations. The author observed and concluded that the students' "youth and refugee status was vital in their *moments of identification*" (p. 183). The students' learning of Black Stylized English (BSE) accessed through Black popular culture, such as rap and hip-hop, helped them to acquire and re-articulate their cultural identities. The author suggests mastering BSE through rap and hip-hop language and culture "is a way of saying, "I too desire and identify with Blackness." (p. 184). The author then demonstrates how BESL (Black English as a Second Language) is acquired through pop-cultural means such as music and movies. One participant says:

We identify ourselves more with the Blacks of America. But, this is normal; this is genetic. We can't since we live in Canada, we can't identify ourselves with Whites or *country music, you know* (laughs). We are going to identify, on the contrary, with people of our color, who have our life style, you know. (p. 186)

The author concludes that "one invests where one sees oneself mirrored, an investment that is as much linguistic as it is cultural" (p. 188). The author urges English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to consider what kind of curriculum material and text to introduce and ask how this material might deconstruct the modernist Black/White dichotomy.

James, C.E. (2018). Race, racialization and Canadian children of immigrant parents. In S. Wilson-Forsberg & A. Robinson (eds.), *Immigrant youth in Canada: Theoretical approaches, practical issues, and professional perspectives* (pp. 33-48). Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Illuminates the experiences of racialized and immigrant youth in Canada. Many young people are identified as immigrants (born outside the country) when, in fact, they are born in Canada. The chapter defines racialization as the process by which personality traits, behaviours, and social characteristics are ascribed because of race and are deemed unchangeable. In Toronto, the racialized population is, at minimum, 30%. Residency patterns suggest immigrant families reside in suburban areas of Toronto, referred to as 'ethno-burbs'. There, youth participate in recreation facilities and religious institutions with others who are racialized. This pattern perpetuates the idea that immigrant youth lack 'mainstream' experience, affecting their integration into society. The youth who attend religious or ethnic-focused schools may be marginalized and alienated from 'mainstream' activities and possibilities. Blacks in particular

encounter an alienating school system in which they perform poorly and a justice system where they are over-represented. Concludes that racialized youth in Canada are experiencing a society which is not egalitarian and not open to cultural differences.

James, C.E. (2005). Constructing aspirations: The significance of community in the schooling lives of children of immigrants. In L. Pease-Alvarez & S.R. Schecter (eds.), *Learning, teaching, and community: Contributions of situated and participatory approaches to educational innovation* (pp. 217-233). Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Discusses how racial-minority immigrant students draw on their experiences with communities, class, and racial affiliations when constructing their educational and career aspirations. The chapter focuses on 7 students (aged 22-25) who resided in Canada before they entered high school. The study revealed how the students' community, Jane-Finch in Toronto, informed their schooling experiences and career aspirations, which included social work, teaching, politics, and law. These aspirations were shaped by how they saw themselves serving the community's needs in the future. Their high school teachers' perceptions were also a significant factor in the students' aspirations. Students with good grades and community service were encouraged to go to university and 'give back' as if 'paying back' a debt to the community they lived in. One student commented: "Business is not for me . . . I think you're in business for yourself . . . not the community or the country" (p. 223). The students' ideas about career were also informed by allegiances and ties to the communities from which their parents emigrated. Students in the wider Black communities of Toronto "explained their aspirations in terms of their raced experiences and immigrant backgrounds" (p. 226); however, they understood higher education as a strategy to resist racialization and marginalization. The author concludes by pointing out that it is certain that many marginalized youth will not attain their goals due to racism and inequitable treatment; however, it is important that communities, families, peers, and teachers continue to present students with possibilities of university education. Students may then "see the feasibility of their aspirations and work toward their own demarginalization" (p. 232).

James, C. E. (2003). Schooling, basketball and US scholarship aspirations of Canadian student athletes. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 6(2), 123-144.

The chances for a US 'full-ride' athletic scholarship is like a lottery - 1% of senior high school athletes are successful. 5 Black/African Canadian high school males in suburban Toronto discuss what their commitment to athletics and gaining US scholarships means to them. Participants in the study employed strategies such as attending the right schools, playing on winning basketball teams, and seeking exposure to college and university coaches and scouts even though the chances of success are considered 'a long shot'. The sentiments and characteristics of the young men in pursuing athletic scholarships included their determination, commitment and optimism. In addition to the strategies the young men employed, participants also played on community leagues

and went to camps and tournaments. They said, for the most part their teachers and coaches were supportive in helping them work toward their goals of gaining US scholarships. The author suggests the aspirations to win US athletic scholarships may be seen as part of working-class Black suburban Toronto male subculture, which is related to marginalisation, racialization of Black male youth. The author and other scholars (Abdul-Shehid, 1997; McCall, 1997) suggest that ideas around winning US basketball scholarships fits into a Black, male, heterosexist paradigm, which is a reflection of the performance of Black masculinity in racialized society. These ideas are part of a discourse which conveys a cultural image of Black people as good athletes and the US as more attractive than Canada for upward social mobility through athletics. The article encourages coaches and teachers of Black male youth to be aware and sensitive that their good intentions to support students may reinforce the racialization and marginalisation of these youth. Coaches and teachers should deem US athletic scholarships as an option, while helping student athletes to effectively combine their participation in sports with their academic activities.

James, C. E., Teclé, S. & Miller, D. (2013). The game plan: How the promise of US athletic scholarships shapes the education of Black Canadian youth. In J. Hall (Ed.), *Children's human rights and public schooling in the United States* (pp. 159-174). New York: Sense Publisher.

Explores the intertwined structures of social class, race, ethnicity, as well as social and schooling supports of two Black student-athletes in Toronto. The two participants, Sam and Desmond, unlike some of their peers, were able to reconcile unrealized US athletic scholarship dreams and attain reachable goals of university education in Toronto. Sam and Desmond both attended enrichment programs, which offered more support opportunities in their younger years. In high school, Sam, with Eritrean-born mother and father, was strongly encouraged to participate in inter-school athletic competitions in soccer, swimming, track and field, basketball, and cross-country. Sam was reminded by his refugee parents to make academics a priority, but coaches, teachers and peers did not encourage academic work. Despite 5 years of commitment to sport, Sam realized he was not going to be chosen by the US college scouts. Sam's final year of high school was stressful, trying to catch up academically and he "became disheartened at the machinery of schooling, and critical of how sport in school was often used . . . to position [him] and many of my Black peers as mere athletes" (p. 168). With his parents' encouragement and some caring teachers, Sam constructed his own pathway to postsecondary education. Desmond's experience was that of having balanced athletic and academic schooling, and encouragement from parents and club coaches – "no homework = no practice" (p. 169). The article emphasizes that it is the teachers' and coaches' role to "[help] students understand how structures operate to affect the opportunities provided to them, and in turn, the choices they are able to make" (p. 173).

James, C. E., & Turner, T. (2017). *Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area*. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: York University.

Provides an in-depth look at the schooling of Black students in Toronto, which boasts the largest concentration (50%) of Blacks in Canada. Blacks are distributed throughout the metropolitan region; however, most inhabit neighborhoods close to the city's core. The majority of Blacks are English-Creole-speaking, of Caribbean descent, with the largest representation from Jamaica and significant representations from Trinidad and Guyana. The report shows Black students are significantly under-represented in the Academic streams and over-represented in the Applied and Essentials streams in TDSB high schools. As well, the report informs us that just under half of all Black secondary school students do not apply and consequently do not attend post-secondary institutions in the province, as compared with a quarter of White students and an ever lower percentage of "Other Racialized" students. Black students are also over-represented in Special Education programs as compared with Other Racialized and/or White students in Ontario. Included in this article are data on suspension rates: 42% of Black high school students, as opposed to 18% of Whites and 15% of Other Racialized minority students, have been suspended at least once in their schooling careers. A key conclusion is that the strength of stereotypes contributes to the low expectations teachers and school administrators have of Black students. This plays out in educators' recommendations regarding course selections and supports for students in their educational pursuits. In the words of one participant: "Racism is a barrier that blocks the ability of Black students to focus on academics."

Lewis, G., Jones, B., & Baker, C. (2012). Translanguaging: Developing its conceptualisation and contextualization. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, (18), 655–670.

Explores definitions of "translanguaging" and compares to code-switching and translation. "Translanguaging is the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages" (Baker, in Lewis et al, p. 655). Students use both of their languages dynamically and functionally to aid in processes of understanding, speaking, literacy, and learning. Translanguaging goes beyond code-switching and translation, which entail a bi-lingual approach or language separation. From a 5-year UK study in 29 schools, authors report that translanguaging may be effective in classrooms where students are encouraged to make flexible use of their bilingual or bidialectal skills. In the study, translanguaging was predominantly found in the arts and humanities rather than math and science. It is concluded that "careful consideration must be given to the sociolinguistic contexts of schools" when considering the use and effect of translanguaging for students (p. 664). Because translanguaging is a move away from language separation, the authors assert that as a practice it is ideological and political in its embrace of fluidity and inclusivity.

Linton, R., & McLean, L. (2017). I'm not loud, I'm outspoken: Narratives of four Jamaican girls' identity and academic success. *Girlhood Studies*, 10(1), 71-88.

Documents navigational strategies adopted to achieve academic success by 4 Jamaican-Canadian girls in Toronto, 3 in high school and 1 in first year of university. All 4 have "very active social lives and were involved in community and cultural activities including playing basketball, attending religious gatherings, and singing. . . . [and] all 4 girls credit their mothers as being their number one cheerleader regardless of parental status" (p. 76). Three themes were captured by the study: 1) Suffering social Injustices made the girls analyze the school situations and work harder as well as strive to perform beyond the low expectations of their teachers; 2) Peer groups and help from peers, parents, and community groups allowed the girls to create their own social capital (feeling like they had clout) in their own groups, regardless of the mainstream hegemony in the school setting; 3) Constructing resistive identity: the girls defined themselves as having "ability to withstand hardships in an unfavorable learning environment" (p. 80), for which they credited their upbringing and the values of their parents. The study concludes with a discussion of 'Black womanness', and the significance of the girls creating a space of their own. Authors suggest the girls' stories in this study demonstrate the importance of the discussion of Black girls' education and disseminating the stories of historical, systemic, and intersectional discrimination in schools.

Posey-Maddox, L. (2017). Schooling in suburbia: The intersections of race, class, gender, and place in black fathers' engagement and family-school relationships. *Gender and Education*, 29(5), 577-593.

Uncovers the strategies used by 16 Black fathers in Wisconsin, USA to engage in their children's education (in grades K-7), challenging the notion that Black fathers are uninvolved or absent. Fathers' engagement and relations with teachers and administrators in predominately white institutional and community settings were studied. The fathers engaged a number of strategies to ensure their children's quality education: 1. Goal setting and communicating high expectations: emphasizing to their child the importance of hopes, goals, and education in order to gain social mobility; 2. Reinforcing and supplementing classroom learning by helping with homework monitoring and assistance; 3. Advice-giving: on how to navigate and address school-related challenges with teachers, peers, bullies, and administrators. "Several fathers spoke of the need to prepare their children—and particularly their adolescent sons—for racist encounters in the predominately white suburb" (p. 585). 4. Making their presence and engagement known in the school, thereby challenging stereotypes of uninvolved fathers and dispelling myths about uninvolved Black fathers in particular; 5. Monitoring for potential educator bias: ensuring that teachers did not have lower expectations of their child or treat their child unfairly; 6. Advocating and intervening: meeting with teachers and principals when necessary to ensure the child was held to high standards, and participating in school-based meetings and activities. Findings suggest the need for

educators to encourage and welcome Black fathers' involvement, build relationships with fathers, and get to know the children's families.

Schechter, S. R., Parejo, I., Ambadiang, T., & James, C. (2014). Schooling transnational speakers of the societal language: Language variation policy in Madrid and Toronto. *Language Policy (13)*, 121-144

Compares how language variation policies in Toronto, Canada and Madrid, Spain are generated and enacted at various levels 'on-the-ground' regarding the integration of bi-dialectal students. Findings of studies on dialectal variation have been bleak and reveal individuals hold negative attitudes toward those perceived to be speaking nonstandard language varieties. Toronto and Madrid were chosen for the study because they boast large percentages of Blacks and Ecuadorians respectively, producing high diversity in the varieties of societal languages spoken. The study aimed to understand the impact of popular ideas regarding language varieties and how policies are generated and enacted in school practices, student experiences, and educational outcomes. Authors examined state/provincial and local policy documents as well as conducted structured focus group discussions with 20 professional educators in 6 schools, 3 in Toronto and 3 in Madrid. Authors also conducted nonparticipant observation of education processes in 6 host-schools with racialized, bi-dialectal, immigrant students. Notably, the Toronto teachers: were more sensitive to issues of immigrant displacement; had more time to devote to extracurricular activities with students due to schooling ethos; and, 3) had support from the ministry and board to accommodate diversity; demonstrated greater sensitivity to bidialectal issues for immigrant students. The authors conclude that both systems need to engage issues at all levels with multiple stakeholders, which includes dialoguing to raise awareness of how race interacts with language variation issues. The authors' vision is engaged pedagogy, professional development seminars for all stakeholders, including teachers, policy makers, students, and parent groups.

Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets that promote resilience: When students believe that personal characteristics can be developed. *Educational Psychologist*, 47(4), 302-314.

Premised on the assumption that resilience is essential for school and life success, the research shows how students can be taught that intellectual abilities and strategies may be developed, as opposed to static and unchangeable. Authors also suggest the ability to change pertains to cultivation of social attributes that allow one to respond effectively to peer victimization and exclusion. The authors conclude that interventions with the goal to change students' mindsets can be effective and that educators can take action to foster mindsets that create possibilities for students to enhance their resilience in educational settings. Note: Carol Dweck has a popular book on the topic of 'growth mindset' called: *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*.