

**2007-2008  
Leadership Seminar Series**

**The Education of Black Male Youth:  
Understanding the Social, Emotional, and Learning Lives of black Male Students**

Sponsored by  
**The Delores Walker Johnson  
Center for Thoughtful Leadership  
at**



and **Wheelock College**

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***Why Black Males are so Over-Represented in School Discipline  
Systems and How This Can be Changed***

**Wednesday, January 16, 2008**

**Jabari Mahiri**

Associate Professor of Language and Literacy, Society and Culture  
University California, Berkeley, Graduate School of Education

Jabari Mahiri is co-director of the Center for Urban Education and a principal investigator for the Diversity Project. He is also an Academy Instructor for the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) and serves on the board of the Bay Area Coalition Equitable Schools (BAYCES).

Before coming to Berkeley, Mahiri helped found and chaired the board of an alternative high school in Chicago. He also taught English in Chicago public high schools for seven years.

Mahiri's research is on the literacy learning of urban youth - particularly African American students – in schools and outside of them. His focus is on writing development and effective teaching and learning strategies in multicultural urban schools and communities.

He holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and M.A. in Education from Northeastern Illinois University.

**The Education of Black Male Youth:  
Understanding the Social, Emotional, and Learning Lives of Black Male Students**

Why Black Males Are So Over-Represented in School Discipline Systems and How This Can Be Changed 1/16/08

Using a mix of media and storytelling, Jabari Mahiri aptly conveyed both the causes and manifestations of black youth in the urban education discipline system. He explained that issues such as cultural & language gap often lead to inequality and disenfranchisement for young black male students in today's educational system.

Focusing on The Diversity Project, a six year project at Harvard that dealt with University and school collaboration, Mahiri shared highlights from the books he authored and edited, "Unfinished Business" and "What They Don't Learn in School", describing the schism between black males students' culture and traditional education system expectations.

Under the pretext that black male youth have a culture and language other than that found in mainstream school settings, Mahiri ascertained that black males enter their school experience at a disadvantage, quickly become disengaged and are often the recipients of school disciplinary action (at a higher rate than their white counterparts). They are on a steeper learning curve because they enter school with different acquired language. They are at Level 1 of cultural knowledge, meaning that they learn their language as an automatic acquisition. At Level 2, one learns a language as a cultural tool, which many of these young students have not yet done.

Referring to "code switching" and ways in which black male youth need to think and act cross culturally in order to succeed, Mahiri described their rite of "infiltrating the system". Beginning with this disadvantage, Mahiri explained, means that this student population either becomes adept at speaking both languages or, more often than not, "drops out" either figuratively or literally.

One way that they've found to include this population of young black students and keep them involved in school is through using their own culture to explore their areas of study. Music, rap, visual arts, mixed media and technology, the language of contemporary youth are the voice of expression and learning at Berkeley Technical Academy. New Media enables New Literacy.

When they studied 33 out of 495 black male youth students sent for discipline issues due to "acts of defiance", they found that there was something significantly different in how teachers discipline black male students. Based on some commonalities in a 2004 study, both quantitative and qualitative indicators showed that teachers had varying levels of compassion, high expectations, and fairness between their reactions to African American and White male youth. Mahiri described this as a "discipline gap" which requires compassionate demanders, who don't change expectations and can be fair in their teaching and discipline.

Using some examples of You Tube pieces, audio and other mixed technology samples, Mahiri showed how literature, ethnography and research can blend to comprise quality and valuable academic work by the students. He showed the audience how cutting edge technology can help students who are at a cultural disadvantage and therefore at a learning disadvantage, can embrace their culture – the language, the technology and the rhythm – to exhibit theoretical knowledge and skill acquisition.

## **Q & A**

Regarding what the students are actually learning, Mahiri spoke of the Math, Design, and engineering principles that students develop through creating video documentaries, digital sound, playing "second life" games such as Avatar and Prims. He said that building things gets the students immediately more interested in learning.

Differentiated Learning; Can it work for everyone? –

Technology can provide a great method for inclusion. Students can learn and experiment in a different way by collaborating, building things, providing a new language and by allowing students to teach students, which teaches them self-management skills.

Technology and teaching – How do we instill this way of teaching?

There is a real gap between professors, student teachers and students. The answer is to downplay stand-alone certification. Model! Integrate and demonstrate that we can utilize different technology mediums to teach. i.e. with new teachers and graduate students, have them introduce themselves using at least three different mediums. Collaborate, teach one another and make it interactive!

## **Resources:**

**What They Don't Learn in School : literacy in the lives of urban youth**  
**Edited By: Jabari Mahiri**

**Racial Politics and the Elusive Quest for Excellence and Equity in Education**  
Pedro A. Noguera      <http://www.inmotionmagazine.com/er/pnrrp1.html>

**Unfinished Business : Closing the Racial Achievement Gap in Our Schools**  
<http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0787972754.html> Pedro A.  
Noguera & Jean Yonemura Wing

**Berkeley Technical Academy**  
<http://btech.berkeley.k12.ca.us/>

**www.youthradio.org & podcasts**  
**http://www.youthradio.org/society/npr2002\_oaklandpoem.shtml**  
**Oakland Scenes: Snapshot of a Community**  
**Rome and Net Net**

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