Deploying Purposeful Scholarship to Accelerate Academic Achievement

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For approximately two decades, our research has focused on examining meaningful issues affecting Black students throughout the educational pipeline (Flowers, 2003; Flowers & Flowers, 2008). Many of the concerns we identified in our scholarly work are longstanding issues within the academic landscape, such as literacy achievement (Flowers, 2016), mathematics proficiency (Flowers & Flowers, 2011), social studies achievement (King & Flowers, 2014), and college student retention (Flowers, 2004). Moreover, studies have documented the potential distress associated with initiatives, policies, laws, and funding issues. Despite significant endeavors to voice concerns about Black students, additional research should investigate the extent to which educational personnel influence student outcomes, the impact of college experiences on graduation rates, and the effects of educational policies on Black students.

Studies by other scholars suggest that systemic problems continue to deter educational success outcomes for Black students (Flores, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Schenke et al., 2017). While there are many accomplishments to highlight about the Black experience in education, several issues remain (Ramlackhan & Wang, 2024). Recognizing that critical scholars want more research focusing on disparities and opportunity gaps (Flores, 2007; Johnson & Kritsonis, 2006), integrating joy in learning (Muhammad, 2023; Stanbrough, 2021; Thomas, 2018), and culturally-enriching learning environments (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Milner, 2011; Paris & Alim, 2014), we recommend that forthcoming studies about Black students emphasize the importance of enhancing research methods and knowledge utilization activities. Align-

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ing research topics with relevant policies while broadening our methodological approaches may enable practitioners and scholars to inform the development and assessment of efficacious educational practices.

In recent years, scholars addressing educational policy issues have examined anti-Black literacy laws (Willis, 2023), detrimental experiences affecting Black girls in schools (McArthur, 2018), disability and special education issues (Mayes, 2022), anti-Black school reform policies (Love, 2023; Royal, 2022), representation of Blacks in gifted education (Davis et al., 2020; Ford et al., 2018), and linguistic justice (Baker-Bell, 2020). However, research assessing the effects of educational policies pertaining to mathematics, social studies, and physical education is limited. Moreover, scholarship analyzing legislative mandates reveals that many educational policies are inattentive in elucidating strategies to improve educational experiences among Black students. Understanding perennial challenges and expressing optimism about the future, we hope this special theme issue encourages scholars to consider relevant and timely topics concerning education and workforce transitions.

As schools and communities continuously adapt to address educational issues impacting students and families (Ellison, 2023), we have observed the emergence of legislation and policies related to K-12 schools and higher education (Flowers et al., 2024). Considering potential changes in educational policies and practices, we advocate studying educational experiences and outcomes among Black students by advancing beyond traditional conversations about the achievement gap. We contend that, as educational researchers, we need to explore additional topics to support Black students including, but not limited to, community engagement (Fuentes, 2012; Perry, 2019), career development, grassroots initiatives (Flowers, 2020), classroom pedagogy, educational leadership diversity, and parenting techniques.

As we coordinated this special theme issue, we aimed to move beyond persistent discussions about academic success. Unless studies focus on unique ways educators and researchers can work within communities to make changes, traditional research topics may not yield new strategies or approaches that address persistent inhibitory factors in educational settings. Through this special theme issue, we hope to foster creative, critical, and constructive research projects that can potentially improve Black students' cognitive and affective outcomes. Additionally, we aspired to accentuate success factors and promising learning frameworks while compiling this issue. Furthermore, we wanted to move beyond describing academic concerns and look within the research literature for concepts and ideas that may inform action plans that increase degree attainment rates among Black students.

In the first article in this issue, titled "The Interdisciplinary Model of African American Students' Academic Profile," Dr. Taylor McGee synthesizes a conceptual framework to cultivate the development of information and practices regarding academic outcomes for African American students. In the second article, "De-Centering Deficit Frameworks and Approaches: The Mentor/Mentee Relationship in an Afterschool Tutoring Program," Dr. Dorian Harrison critically analyzes an afterschool tutoring program and generates ideas to augment literacy outcomes for Black males participating in afterschool tutoring programs. In the

third article, "A Review of School-Based Interventions for Black Boys' School Success," Dr. Gale and co-authors identify prominent areas within the research literature that promote success among Black boys in schools. In the fourth article, "Returning to the Source: Black Teachers Centering Justice with Black Students in Chicago Public Schools," Dr. Asif Wilson provides an overview of Black teachers' connections to the historic Bronzeville community in Chicago. In the fifth article, titled "Leveraging Black Youth Voice in Florida Amid COVID-19 to Add to the Discourse about Re-Envisioning the Educational Futures of Black Students," Dr. L. Trenton S. Marsh and co-authors discuss the experiences of Black students in Florida during the COVID-19 pandemic. The culminating contribution to this issue is a book review about *Black Immigrant Literacies: Intersections of Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom* (Smith, 2023), which focuses on the educational experiences of Black Caribbean students. In the book review, Darlshawn Patterson summarizes the text while describing issues affecting educational experiences among Black immigrant students.

This special theme issue is a collaboration between *The Urban Review*, the Literacy Research Association's Ethnicity, Race, and Multilingualism committee, and Clemson University's Charles H. Houston Center. This issue aims to inspire forthcoming research studies about Black students by examining past research and focusing on current research about the educational pipeline. In presenting this special theme issue, we hope to encourage scholars to consider novel methodologies that motivate researchers to generate innovative studies while illuminating insights about success factors concerning Black students. Additionally, we hope to see more ethnographic studies examining Black students' experiences in elementary, middle, and high schools. Furthermore, we want to encourage multi-year focus group studies investigating Black parenting strategies, particularly during middle school and high school. We also want to inspire teacher action research and reflective studies comparing approaches that enhance collaboration outcomes among Black families. Moreover, we support scholarly analyses of practices pertaining to establishing business and school partnerships, improving study skills, optimizing the use of technology in schools, expanding job training curricula, financing postsecondary education, and enhancing institutional outcomes at community colleges and historically Black colleges and universities. To discover new directions within the research literature, scholars must produce research that serves and protects communities by building trust within the research context, which may also increase the likelihood of creating better educational environments and opportunities for Black students and families.

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