



# STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES THAT RAISE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN AT-RISK SCHOLARS

Dr. Jeffrey Grant

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

All students are created equal but are not educated equitably.

Many communities are denied access to a quality education.

The outdated practices implemented by many educators and education systems are not meeting the needs of **ALL STUDENTS**.

The children are not “At-Risk”; They are “SCHOOL DEPENDENT” (Yvette Jackson)

# OBJECTIVES OF THIS SEMINAR

1

**Acknowledge the historical practices that have created the current environment.**

2

**Develop a mindset that all children have the capacity to achieve at high levels.**

3

**Identify “Best Practices” that will enable all students (regardless of race, socio-economic level, gender, etc.) to learn.**

# “AT-RISK” OR “SCHOOL DEPENDENT”?

## At-Risk Student

- The term **at-risk** is often used to describe students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school...due to homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence, transiency, or other conditions, learning disabilities, low test scores, disciplinary problems, grade retentions, or other learning-related factors that could adversely affect the educational performance and attainment of some students.  
([www.edglossary.org](http://www.edglossary.org))

## School-Dependent Student

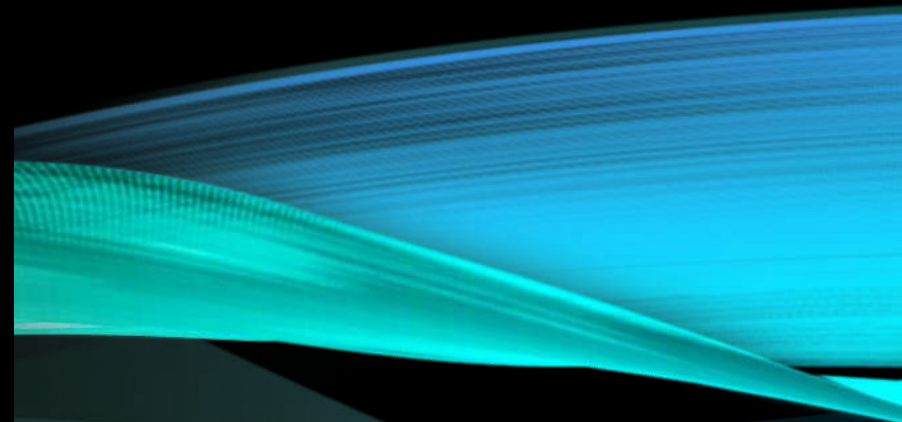
- Children who enroll in school and are “surviving” with social, economic, political, housing, and physical deficiencies and deficits.
- Children who receive services and interventions that will address these deficits and deficiencies at and from their schools.

(Pedagogy of Confidence, Yvette Jackson)



# LET'S MEET JEFFREY

**African-American Male  
Born in 1965 in  
Washington, DC**





# FAMILY-STRUCTURE

- Father Charles, born in Rocky Mount, NC, in 1937; Parents did not attend college; orphaned at 17 yrs. of age when parents died one month apart
  - Graduated from segregated Booker T. Washington HS
  - Working at the US Post Office as a clerk
- Mother Valerie, born in Washington, DC, in 1939; Her dad graduated Valedictorian from HS; Dishonorably discharged from Army for striking an officer who had called him a racially-charged term; Dad became dependent on alcohol; Raised by her mom
  - Chosen (one of 75) to integrate a DC public high school with an all-White student population of over 2000 (all-White administration and teaching staff)
  - 1 year of college
  - Housewife; Began working for the US Federal Government (GS-3) when Jeffrey was 18-months old.
- Sister, Pamela, is 3 years old
- Family lives in a 2-bedroom apartment in DC in a lower working-class neighborhood that has a majority African-American population.

# WHAT IS YOUR STORY? EVERYONE HAS ONE.

Take 2 minutes to outline your story

- When were you born?
- To whom were you born?
  - What is their story?
- Do you have siblings? Who are they?
- Where did you live?

# POLICIES IMPACTING JEFFREY'S EXPERIENCE

- Historically, education policy has been unable to adequately increase achievement levels in urban schools.
- Other policies (job, wage, housing, tax and transportation policies) continue high levels of poverty within urban areas, which ultimately create/maintain environments in which education policies meant to improve schools are insufficient.
- Attempted federal educational policies:
  - Vocational programs (Vocational Education Acts of 1963)
  - Policies to make more equitable education (Brown v. Board; Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965; Bilingual Act of 1968)



# DATA WEAPONIZED: THE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION PROCESSES

## What is this process?

- Assessment is the process of documenting usually in measurable terms, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs.
- Evaluation refers to the process of making judgments, placing value, or deciding worth.

## Problems with Evaluation

A lot of evidence suggests that certain groups of students are not assessed fairly, due to the predetermined notions primarily White, middle-class teachers have about what constitutes successful school performance.

# **“ANALYSIS OF HISTORICAL DATA” CREATED THE NARRATIVE**

**Assessment  
results were used  
to destroy  
potential and  
futures**

**Lack of belief in  
the capacity of  
poor,  
underachieving  
students**

**“The Real Gap” -  
The at-risk  
students gap  
between their  
potential and  
their  
achievement.**

**Prejudging of  
urban students  
continued to be  
insurmountable:**

- 73% of teachers are  
White or racially and  
culturally different



# **ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS**

**How do policies and data impact your students?**

**Federal**

**State**

**District**

**Schoolwide**

# JEFFREY'S PATH

- ❖ **Parents enrolled him and his siblings in Private Catholic Schools.**
  - ❖ **Exposed to complex texts and problem-solving activities**
  - ❖ **Engaged in discussions on content to which he had never been exposed**
  - ❖ **He participated in field experiences that exposed him to the content.**
    - ❖ **Jeffrey learned to travel locally to access the content.**

**“New Info” - Black males are chastised for being intelligent. Jeffrey had to defend himself going to and from school. He adopted an aggressive mindset.**

# ADULT JEFFREY'S MINDSET PHASES


## 1) **African-American Male Raised in an Urban Environment**

More likely to be incarcerated or murdered than any other demographic in the USA

## 2) **Educator and Education Leader**

High intellectual performance is innate and can be expressed in ALL humans under the appropriate circumstances (Reuven Feuerstein)





**SCHOOLS ARE  
FAILING FOR  
PEOPLE LIKE  
JEFFREY:  
WHAT DO WE DO?**

**Professional Development**

**Teacher Evaluations**

**Curriculum Model and Content Control**

**Replace School Staff**

**Charter Takeover**

**Close and Combine**

# **STEPS TO RAISE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT**

**Much is needed in order to change the outcomes for many scholars who are learning within the current school systems serving the nation's children. It is my belief that we are here at the Innovative School Summit to make dramatic progress in our planning to address the deficits and deficiencies that currently reside in our classrooms and hallways.**

**It also my belief, grounded in three decades of immersion in the field of urban education, that the following strategies will make significant inroads on this journey.**

**FIRST: LEARN  
THE CHILD,  
THEN TEACH**

**“THE ELECTION”**

## **Make strong efforts to learn the children and their communities**

Recognize  
their and their  
families'  
journeys

Schedule  
home and  
neighborhood  
visits

Have  
exploratory  
conversations  
with parents/  
guardians

Review  
academic  
records from  
previous years

Attend their  
outside-of-  
school games  
and activities



## **Incorporate their culture into your lesson planning, activities, and literature**

These practices build important relationships that are key to getting the scholars to adopt your vision for them. They must trust and believe in you for them to follow you!

# RELATIONSHIPS ARE KEY!

YOU NEED TO BE ABLE TO SIMULTANEOUSLY MOTIVATE AND HOLD PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE

Build bonds with each group of stakeholders that you will be engaging:

STUDENTS

STUDENTS'  
FAMILIES

STAFF  
MEMBERS

GOVERNING  
BODIES

COMMUNITY  
BUSINESSES AND  
ORGANIZERS

# SECOND: MAXIMIZE TIME ON TASK

The United States of America adopted the “Agrarian Calendar” around 1900



“A Nation at Risk” Report that urged schools to add time to the school year

## Give the “Gift of Time”

- Every individual progresses at his/her own pace
- Create a schedule that allows students to take deep dives into the content.
- Create a schedule that will encourage cross-curricular collaboration between teachers.
- Plan lessons that have scholars exploring and discovering, not listening to teachers lecture.
- Plan lessons that have scholars sharing and instructing.

**Monument Academy PCS Residential Model**



# THIRD: USE THE CALENDAR TO ADDRESS LEARNING LOSS

- Alternative Calendars can negate the learning loss that occurs over the long breaks (summer slide)
  - 45-15 Model
    - 45 days of instruction
    - 15 days for vacation/break
  - 60-20 Model
    - 60 days of instruction
    - 20 days for vacation/break

**Monument Academy PCS**

What do you do when you do not control the calendar?

- Incorporate extended-day programming that allows the scholars to explore their interests
- Create and/or implement a tutoring program that remediates student deficits.
- Create and/or implement weekend and summer programming that enriches and remediates for scholars

# FOURTH: PROVIDE A ROBUST CURRICULUM FOR ALL LEARNERS

Access to and the utilization of a rigorous, comprehensive curriculum and the curriculum's resources will enable all students to learn.

- Language Immersion
  - Montessori
  - STEM / STEAM
  - International Baccalaureate (IB)
  - Thematic Planning
- Identifying scholars where they are academically before engaging them is the prerequisite for ensuring all students grow academically.
  - Educators must take the time to learn their students by researching the children's communities, their culture, their families' situations, and their prior exposure to the content.
    - "The textbook dilemma" (Not a Curriculum)

## What do you do when you do not control the curriculum?

(Compensate for lack of exposure)

- Constant and consistent exposure to the following:
  - Higher-order questioning and problem-solving
    - Stems: How, Why, What if...?
  - Utilization of Tier-2 and Tier-3 vocabulary words
  - Relevant field experiences connected to the content
  - Writing across the curriculum
  - Project-based learning
- **Relevant content that can be applied to their current and future successes**

# THE REALITY OF THE MAJORITY OF AT-RISK SCHOLARS "SHAKESPEARE IN BATON ROUGE"

Sociocultural  
Deprivation: The  
Illusive Inhibitor  
of Intellectual  
Development  
(Dr. Reuven  
Feuerstein)



Missing links to  
one's own  
culture



Knowing one's  
own culture  
provides the  
anchor to past  
history and the  
adaptation  
tools needed to  
strive for the  
possibilities of  
one's future.



Culture is  
shared and  
elaborated  
through  
interactions  
specifically  
selected by a  
parent, relative,  
or teacher

## **FIFTH: ADDRESS CLASS SIZES TOO LARGE FOR ALL SCHOLARS TO LEARN**

- Over-crowded classrooms prevent students from accessing the content with fidelity.
- Schools in lower socio-economic communities have historically been underfunded due to the decision-making of the national and local governments. Ultimately, this phenomenon is the direct result of voters choosing to elect officials who make these decisions.

### **What do you do when you do not control class sizes?**

- Small group rotations
- Offer additional opportunities for engagement with the content (extended-day programming)
- Partner with parents and community partners to incorporate volunteers into the academic day

# YOUR TASK: MODEL WHAT YOU EXPECT

## Symbolic Interactionism (Max Weber and George Herbert Mead)

- Symbolic interactionism theory assumes that people respond to elements of their environments according to the subjective meanings they attach to those elements, such as meanings being created and modified through social interaction involving symbolic communication with other people.

## Proximal Process (Urie Bronfenbrenner)

- Enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment
- Bioecological Model
  - Processes (interactions with objects or people)
  - Person (personality, physical appearance, inherited IQ)
  - Context (home, school, peer group, community)
  - Time (time during a process, length of a process, or cultural and historical time period)



IN CLOSING...

“Perfect  
practice makes  
permanent”

“Inspect what  
we expect”

# WHERE IS JEFFREY TODAY?

- 30-year Educator and Award-Winning Education Leader
- Four Degrees
  - Education Leadership and Policy Studies, EdD
  - Education Technology Leadership, M.A.
  - Political Science, B.A.
  - Philosophy, A.A.

**Through the implementation of these strategies, he has accomplished the following:**

- Successfully turned around 4 schools as a Principal
- Successfully turned around 2 schools as National Head of Schools
- Successfully opened 2 schools as National Head of Schools
- Successfully took over and turned around one school as CEO