

BOTH WAYS" COMMUNICATION WITH DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH AFRICAN AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES by Dr. Alfred Lewis

INTRODUCTION:

In many African American communities thru out the United States the benefits for special education have not been equitably distributed for all children (Pasternack, 2002). African American children with disabilities all too often experience inadequate services, low-quality curriculum and instruction, and unnecessary isolation from their non-disabled peers. As a researcher and being a parent of a middle school age African American student with special needs, I have personally experience these problems. Also this lack of equity was a major undertaking of my research.

Pasternack (2002) determined that many general and special education teachers, as well as the administrators and other personnel who work with them, are often ill prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities. A major concern, particularly for special educators who must assess and then serve the students identified as having disabilities, is the rising number of children eligible for special education. For example, The National Research Council (NRC) was asked to conduct a study to determine the factors accounting, for the disproportionate representation of minority students and males=2 0in special education programs and to identify placement criteria or practices in 1982.

Disproportion in special education persists: while 5 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students are identified for special education, the rate for Hispanics is 11 percent, for whites 12 percent, for American Indians 13 percent, and for African Americans well over 14 per cent. On the other hand African Americans and other minorities constitute a lower rate of total enrollment in most schools in the United States.

STIGMA:

Overwhelming evidence on patterns of visual contact with Individuals with Disabilities and more so with African Americans in their communities is prevalent. Examples are the intense inspection by pointing and staring and in some cases taking photographs as if to verify a stigmatized disability such as historical slave market auctions for Blacks and displays of people with disabilities. On the other hand Africa Americans with disabilities are subject to stigmatization and discrimination both as a people of color and as people with disabilities. This “double oppression” (Stuart, 1992) having two statuses which are negatively valued by society can intensify the marginalization of African Americans who are already excluded from the mainstream. Within the African American community there is a perception that African Americans with disabilities are incompetent and therefore are treated unequal. While on the other hand many people who disclaim any disability prejudice may nonetheless react in a prejudiced and exclusionary manner in real life interactions with African Americans with disabilities in there communities. Lastly, For African American women with disabilities “the double jeopardy” of minority and disability status become a ‘triple jeopardy’ with the added element of gender(Glen, 1995). In the African American cultural, gender expectations reflect the cultural values of the black family and the community.

AFRICAN AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES FACE SPECIAL CHALLENGES BECAUSE:

Due to the socioeconomic factors regarding service delivery for African Americans with disabilities²⁰they are more often to be affected in accessing services in their communities. That socioeconomic status—particularly income and mother’s education—matters is beyond dispute. Factors that influence health differences range from societal behavior, such as hiring practices, to individual knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors. For instants the poverty rate for African Americans with disabilities is 37 percent. The rate for African Americans without disabilities is 19.2 percent. Does the timing of poverty matter? A review of the effects of the timing of poverty on child outcomes suggests that the income gradient is operating throughout the first two decades of life (Duncan and Brooks-Gunn, 1979b). With this increase more health resources and visible national leadership related

to African Americans with disabilities are needed. Within the African American culture and in their communities they are more often to face many challenges because of socioeconomic, health, cultural, and other factors. On the other hand prejudice and economic barriers deny African Americans with disabilities their full participation in their own communities. Therefore, to address some of these issues non traditional approaches are needed. Such as using mobile health units that go into communities and providing transportation to community service providers.

CULTURAL BELIEFS

Cultural beliefs and traditional ways of life are important factors that must be understood in African American Communities. The black church and religion has always been a positive force in the struggle for justice and equality for African Americans as well as African Americans with disabilities. Within the Black community African American churches help to reaffirm goals of equality and justice through increased inclusion of those with mental, physical and developmental disabilities. By supporting and encouraging participation of the disabled, African American churches not only improve the spiritual well being of the black community but contribute to overall societal unification. Also, you will find that African American Parents and family members with developmentally disabled children relying on religion to mediate the stress of parenting a developmentally disabled child. Moreover, church participation and religious beliefs are significant sources of support for African American women with disabilities. Factors, that influence health differences range from societal behavior, such as hiring practices, to individual knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors. The poverty rate for African Americans with disabilities is 37 percent. For African Americans without disabilities it is 19.2 percent.

With the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967. It was expected that there would be improvements for services for African Americans with disabilities. To answer this question Employment and Education of African Americans with disabilities are still lacking in some African American communities.

AFRICAN—AMERICANS: VIOLENCE, DISABILITY, AND PUBLIC POLICY

What has been true in the Criminal Justice system is also true in the School to Prison Pipeline: African Americans, especially young black males, have felt the brunt of the dramatic policy shift away from education and towards incarceration. For example; Minority students with disabilities are particularly vulnerable, since many schools regard jail as the default special education placement for poor and minority children. African American students with disabilities are three times more likely to receive short—term suspensions than their white counterparts and are more than four times as likely to end up in Correctional Facilities—Johanna Wald and Dan Losen, “Defining and Re—directing a School-to Prison Pipeline, “New Directions for Youth Development (No. 99, fall 2003).

While only approximately 8.6% of children in Public School have been identified as having disabilities that impact their ability to learn a recent study (Sue Burrell & Lauren Warboys, Special Education and the Juvenile Justice System, OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, at 1 (July 2000) Found that, on average, approximately 32% of youth in Juvenile corrections had been previously identified as having special learning needs. For many, many years, the benefits for special education have not been equitably distributed for all children (Pasternack, 2002). African American children with disabilities all too often experience inadequate services, low-quality curriculum and instruction, and unnecessary isolation from their non-disabled peers. The researcher, being a parent of a middle school age African American student with special needs, has had personal experience and problems associated with this lack of equity which is one of the reasons the study is undertaken.

Kindly.

Dr. Alfred Lewis