

You Can't be BIG if Little Got You!
What Educators Can Do About the Problem of
African American Student
Underrepresentation in GATE Programs

Gail L. Thompson, Ph.D.
Illuminate Education: Equity & Professional Development Expert
Website: www.drgatilthompson.com
Email: gthompson@illuminateed.net

**Research-Based Causes of African American Student
Underrepresentation in GATE Programs**

- Many teachers and school leaders don't know how to work effectively with African American students.
- Many teachers and school leaders don't believe that African American students are as intelligent as nonblack students.
- Many teachers and school leaders don't believe that African American K-12 students are capable of academic excellence.
- Many teachers and school leaders have very low expectations of African American students.
- Many teachers and school leaders don't treat or view African American students in the same ways that they do nonblack students.
- Many teachers and school leaders want and need professional development to help them work more effectively with African American students.

Theme

All children are gifted and talented. However, many educators fail to identify "giftedness" in African American students. When more educators *choose* to identify and address barriers that prevent them from seeing brilliance in African American students, and develop a "Big Mindset," about them, more African American students will gain access to GATE Programs that will increase their chances of having a bright future.

A "Big (or Growth) Mindset" equates to having an "Equity-driven Mindset," which consists of believing that:

- **Regardless of race or background, all students deserve to have equal access to an outstanding education.**
- **Regardless of race or background, all students deserve to be treated fairly.**
- **Every educator has a professional obligation to provide all students with equal access to an outstanding education.**

How to Develop a Big Mindset About African American Students

1. Keep a journal in order to record your observations, experiences, and growth, and review them on an ongoing basis.
2. Monitor yourself by examining your thoughts and interactions with African Americans on a regular basis.
3. Try to become aware of negative thoughts About African Americans when they occur.
4. Criticize and critique negative thoughts about African Americans when they occur.
5. Use Relationship-Building strategies to improve your relations with African American students and learn more about them.
6. Leave your comfort zone by making a choice to interact more with your African American colleagues in order to learn more about African American culture and diversity.
7. Look for potential, instead of pathology in students.
8. Expand your definitions of “giftedness” and “creativity by viewing the videos on the “Genius is Common” website.
9. Incorporate African American history, role models, literature, etc. into the curriculum throughout the school year, and not just in February.
10. Practice the Golden Rule.
11. Use multiple types of assessments: quizzes and tests, writing assignments, individualized and group presentations, mock trials, debates, game-building, artwork, poster projects, etc.
12. Be willing to provide extra assistance in academic areas where a student may have been underserved.
13. Improve your confidence and assertiveness skills.
14. Embed conflict-resolution and resiliency-building strategies into the curriculum on an ongoing basis.
15. Create a welcoming and inclusive class climate.
16. Continue to examine and address your beliefs that will impede your progress with African American students on a regular basis.
17. Read the Recommended Readings and complete the Personalized Professional Growth Exercises.

How to Develop Positive Relationships With African American Students

- View them as humans who have strengths, weaknesses, goals, dreams, etc. like all humans have.
- Remember that they possess knowledge and cultural capital that can be beneficial to you.
- Treat them respectfully.
- Apologize when warranted.
- Keep healthy boundaries.
- Smile.
- Compliment and praise them.
- Help natural leaders hone their leadership skills.
- Learn more about them through assignments like “The Timeline Project,” “The All About Me Project,” and the “Community Problem-Solving Project.”

Recommended Readings

- *Yes, You Can: Advice for Teachers Who Want a Great Start and Great Finish With Their Students of Color* by Gail Thompson & Rufus Thompson
- *The Power of One: How You Can Help or Harm African American Students* by Gail L. Thompson
- *Up Where We Belong: Helping African American and Latino Students Rise in School and in Life* by Gail L. Thompson

Extended Professional Development

1. List three things that you are willing to do in order to help African American students in your classroom, school or district have access to GATE.
2. How will you hold yourself accountable?
3. What is your timeline to take action?