"How people act and live are shaped - though in no way dictated or determined - by the larger circumstances in which they find themselves" (West, 2001, p. 18). Youth in our schools look to their peers for approval, to the adults in their lives for clues to their strengths and weaknesses, and to the larger society for messages about who they are and what they can become. Unfortunately, many black male students carry the scars of historically chronic and blatant racial stereotyping which negatively impacts their self -identity and educational well-being (Holcomb-McCoy, p. 59). Engagement with positive role models that the black students can both relate to and identify with, and who have walked down the same road as the students can overcome adversity and reverse the negative course (Kafele, 2009).

A Discussion of the Problem or Need

Absent in history and in our schools is attention paid to the many important contributions black Americans have made to our society. Such treatment and views have been so consistent and harsh over the generations that many black Americans have internalized these views and feelings of worthlessness (West, 2001). These negative perceptions and lack of self-worth are perpetuated because black youth don't see any means out of their current situation. Damon, a 13 year old black male in eighth grade, explains it well. "Boys drop out of school because they're 'following what they see," and they do not see black males who are traditionally successful. (Sparrow & Sparrow, 2012, p. 3).

Unfortunately, approximately 50 percent of black children in the United States live in households without a father figure present (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2012). "Media images of black youth are disproportionately negative (Entman & Rojecki, 2000)" (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011, p. 60). There is a shortage of positive black educator role models in K-12 public education (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). During two focus group sessions of African American males in Michigan, students reported that they have had few African American female teachers and no African American male teachers (MDE, 2013). In addition, "generally they felt school would be easier to handle if there were more African American teachers in the classrooms" (MDE, 2013, p. 6).

Where male models do exist, African American students thrive. Toldson (2008) found that students who reported fathers in the home out-performed students reporting no father in the household. Furthermore, students whose fathers graduated from college were significantly more likely to report good grades. Toldson (2008) attributes these results in part to proper role modeling. When interviewing African American boys in grades 4-6, Lewis and Hilgendorf (2009) learned that adult males (e.g., fathers, grandfathers, uncles) played a significant role for nearly all the boys.

A Description of the Intervention

In order to address the complex, persistent needs of young African-American males, Principal Baruti Kafele (2012) developed the Young Men's Empowerment Program as a practical blueprint for educators to enlist adult black male role models and mentors in providing needed direction, guidance and leadership.

He began by transforming every Monday into a "Power Monday". All students were expected to dress for school in professional business attire and participate in a presentation and discussion led by staff members, men from the community and/or our students. Black history and contemporary topics vital to male students' growth and development, such as goal setting, leadership, relationships, and entrepreneurship, were discussed. Diverse speakers were brought in to tell stories of how they became successful including how they made and overcame mistakes – stories that could empower the students. Often black male students would address topics and questions at grade level or whole school meetings. Eventually they became role models offering advice to younger students and speaking at elementary and middle schools.

Kafele found that students looked forward to Power Mondays and that they began behaving differently. There were fewer disciplinary referrals and school wide achievement improved, so much so that Newark Tech High School gained national recognition. Due to the success of the empowerment meetings, Kafele developed a comprehensive program for elementary, middle and high schools that included the following additional components.

- Small group sessions of three to ten students led by black males.
- One-on-one mentoring with a black male trained to work with African American male students.
- Opportunities to meet and spend time with male college students that include visits on campus.
- Opportunities to meet and spend time with successful black men in their workplace.

- Having black male political leaders meet with students at school and in their local offices.
- If it is not practical to have students dress professionally every Monday, set aside special Dress for Success days and treat them as celebrations.
- After-school male study groups in which students discuss shared interests - such as learning about black historical figures.

Kafele found the Program to be an effective intervention in racially diverse schools as well as in majority black schools. He also found that female students benefit from a comparable Young Women's Empowerment Program.

The nationally recognized Brotherhood, a school-based mentoring program within Chicago Public Schools, has also successfully empowered African American male students to raise academic achievement, grow socially and aspire for greater success by forming relationships of support between students and trained adults (Wyatt, S., 2009).

Actions for Implementation of the Intervention (Kafele, 2009)

1. Form an empowerment committee that includes teachers from different grade levels, a counselor and an administrator at your school.
2. Conduct a needs assessment of the African-American population of the school to determine what needs to change and what is inhibiting students from meeting their goals.
3. Simultaneously conduct an assessment of school resources, including the ability to attract people with the experience and expertise to be mentors or role models.
4. Consider tapping school staff and partnering with fraternities and sororities, businesses and other community agencies that can provide a rich pool of African-American men and women.
5. Set goals for the program that are aligned with the school curriculum and written as SMART goals – specific, measureable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.
6. Determine program components that support the goals and the topics, content and learning processes of the components.
7. Implement the program, integrating goals into activities and materials so that students actively pursue them.
8. Have the empowerment committee assess the program at mid-points and at the end of the pilot or school year according to the goals and the actual outcomes.
9. Make adjustments to the program, as needed, based upon evidence.

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