

JNE ScholarOne E-News #8

Happy New Year! I hope you had a safe and joyous holiday season. This latest installment of E-news features something new to its generous supporters titled, "FTE: From the Expert". This feature will be exclusive one-on-one interviews with educational experts who drive the African American education equity research paradigm.

FTE: From the Expert

Interviewed by: Natascha F. Saunders, Doctoral Candidate

The Journal of Negro Education had a chance to interview Dr. A. Wade Boykin, Director of the Graduate Program in the Department of Psychology at Howard University. He also serves as the Executive Director of the Capstone Institute, where he and other scholars and practitioners conduct research and intervention activities aimed at educating the whole learner.

The Journal of Negro Education Fall 2014 publication will include Dr. Boykin's piece titled, Human Diversity, Assessment in Education and the Achievement of Excellence and Equity. We invite you to look for that upcoming publication and welcome you to read our interview below which shares personal and academic insights from Dr. Boykin.



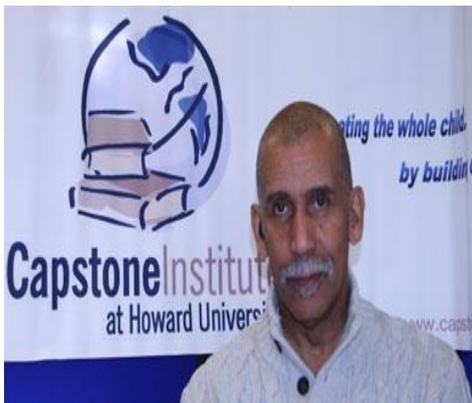
Q1: Did you always plan to be in the field of psychology?

Dr. Boykin: No, I became interested in psychology during high school. I went to a high school in Detroit, Michigan in my home town called Cass Technical High School. It was a school where students picked a given curriculum. I was in one called science and arts. I guess you might say it was like what you would call the TAG program, the talented and gifted programs; this was in the early 1960s. The point of it was in high school, I had 4 years of chemistry, 2 years of physics, 3 years of biology, and 4 years of math. It was a very strong math/science concentration. I wanted to be a researcher, I wanted to be a scientist, but the more I worked with test tubes, the more I worked with frogs I felt that this was not sufficiently interesting for me but I still wanted to remain focused as a scientist.

I was going through some career books in the library in twelfth grade and came across something called experimental psychology where you could do empirical research, use the scientific method, but you're focusing more on human activities rather than working with test tubes or frogs or whatever the case might be. So I went to college with the idea of majoring in psychology and ultimately going on to be an experimental psychologist. So that's what got me on that track.

Q2: How would you summarize your research interests?

Dr. Boykin: That's such a hard question to answer. I think a starting point is that I don't see myself as a research psychologist doing basic research, nor do I see myself as doing applied research but more basic research on applied problems. I want to be able to get as close as possible, using experimental methodologies, to isolate what has really caused or impacted unambiguously certain outcomes. Outcomes that have interested me have been things having to do with education and achievement. Having said that, maybe the best way to capture my work as a research psychologist, is that **I like to do basic research on applied problems that center around this busy intersection where issues of cognition, motivation, culture, context and African American child and adolescent development all come together** in support of informing ways to enhance educational outcomes especially for African American children and youth. Although my interests do extend to of color more generally and for American children more broadly speaking. I think that the issues confronting American schooling today are bigger than just closing the achievement gap between minority students and their majority group counterparts.



Q3: Can you briefly expand on what you may mean when you say bigger than closing an achievement gap?

Dr. Boykin: For example, we know there is a well-documented achievement gap between white students and their African American and Latino counterparts. But that's not the only gap that faces American schooling today. If you look at some of the recent findings from international data sets comparing students across nations around the world, American students *across the K12 spectrum* come out in the middle of the road compared to students from certain countries in Asian and certain countries in Europe. We have some

catching up to do, if you will. **And then it seems that too many schools and school districts are still doing work that is essentially preparing students for the rigors, responsibilities, and realities of the twentieth century as opposed to the twenty first century.** What this means is there is a gap at preparing students to be good at word memorization and being more knowledge consumers (20th Century Preparation), rather than being knowledge producers, and preparing students to use their creative and critical thinking skills to have innovative solutions to persistent problems (21st Century Preparation). And it's this gap that's getting students ready for the twentieth century when we should be getting them ready for the twenty first century.

Q4: Have there been any major influences in history that have impacted you personally?

Dr. Boykin: I started graduate school in 1968 at the University of Michigan in psychology and it was a pretty tumultuous time as you could imagine. I'm from Detroit, the year before I started graduate school there was a riot in Detroit starting 6 blocks from my house. The Vietnam War was happening and there were anti-war protests across the country.

In 1969, something called the black action movement started at the University of Michigan, **basically it was black students, graduates and undergraduates, who essentially shut the university down for several days to protest among other things, why we don't have the number of black students enrolled at the University of Michigan that is proportionate to the population in the state of Michigan, since it was a state university.**

While all this was going down at the University of Michigan; I'm upstairs in the lab doing my master's thesis project on the effects of level and range of complexity values on the visual exploratory behavior of agouti hooded rats. I loved research, I liked doing science and the likes. I got involved in the movement but I also wanted to make my professional life consistent with the values that this movement was promoting. So I began the quest to see how I could take the skills that I was developing as a research scientist and make them relevant to support the uplift of black people, of people of color.

I begin thinking about what was happening with programs like Head Start which was just beginning. I started to think about what is a major issue that I could focus on. Black kids for example, were not doing as well in school as their white counterparts. What goes on in school, at the basic level; its problem solving, its thinking, its learning, its motivation? What does an experimental psychologist

study? We study problem solving, thinking, motivation, and learning through the use of experimental methodology.

So I said I ought to be able to take what I am learning to become an expert at, doing research that will inform, for example, ways to improve the performance of black kids in academic settings. That's what I've been doing for the last 44 years.

Q5: What advice can you offer aspiring researchers?

Dr. Boykin: Have the courage to have the power to define. **Be driven less by ideology and more by empirical evidence** and understand and center the work that you do more proactively as opposed to negatively or reactively, in the **lived experiences of people of African descent**. That's not saying you're there to be a cheerleader for black people, it's not saying it's about what's better or what's worse. **It's not so much about being different or being the same as other groups, it's about showing that there is integrity in the life experiences of black people.** Integrity implies the notion that there's complexity, there is depth, and there is coherence that is accrued as a consequence of African American experiences in this country and throughout the Diaspora. So it's about taking an integrity based approach, not a difference versus same, not a better versus worse, not a good versus bad, but that there's complexity and coherence and depth in the life experiences that are worth capturing that is so important.

Q6: Lastly, we are featuring your piece titled, 'Human Diversity Assessment Education and the Achievement of Excellence in Equity' any final words?

Dr. Boykin: I introduce a human capacity building framework. The short story there is that **assessment should not be used to differentiate folks or used to sort people by who the smart ones are, and who are not. Assessments should be used primarily in the service of human capacity building** not to weed out folks, but to use it for human capacity building. We look at assessments for learning. We don't just look at assessments of people, but assessment of the context in which students function; asking questions such as, 'Is it an enabling context for students to learn in or is it a disabling context primarily?' So the focus should be on assessment for learning, and not just on student assessment but assessment of the context so we know whether or not that context is one which is going to foster pervasive human capacity building. And along that line, I expand on this area of thought in a recent book that I co-authored with Pedro Noguera of NYU titled ***Creating the Opportunity to Learn: Moving from Research to Practice to Close the Achievement Gap.***

We thank Dr. Boykin for sparing time to share his story and experiences. Look for Dr. Boykin's article in the upcoming JNE Fall 2014 edition.

ScholarOne Q & A

Q: I am ready to forward my review of however, I have two attachments, one for you and the other for the author. Do I attach them both to the evaluation form?

A: There is a place to attach both documents on the online site where you can load them separately or together when you add your manuscript review.

Dear Editor,

It appears that I was not directly receiving emails or reminders from Manuscript Central. The communications were in my Junk/Spam folder. I, however, did receive our initial emails from your email address. I have approved the sender address for the journal system and should be able to immediately respond to requests to review. My apologies for the nonresponse last semester.

Dear Reviewer,

Thank you for checking your junk /spam folder for them. I was beginning to think you were avoiding me! Thank you for your continued support.

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Another satisfied JNE ScholarOne E-news bulletin reader.



Lenda P. Hill

Associate Editor

The Journal of Negro Education