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Preamble to Student Research and Dissertation on ABCS Research Route

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INTRODUCTION
The Free Within Ourselves Academically-Based Community Service (ABCS) Research Project has been funded by the 2002 NTFS Award and research fellowship presented to Dr Gloria Gordon in 2002 for demonstrating excellence in teaching and learning (Gordon, 2006). The Academically Based Community Service idea originated at the University of Pennsylvania under the leadership of Ira Harkavy at the Centre for Community Partnerships (Harkavy, 2001). The theme of ‘being free within ourselves’ is taken from John Dewey’s view of education as philosophy and is expected to facilitate the strategic focus placed on the British African-Caribbean community (BAC). All students carrying out research under the umbrella of this Project are required to use the BAC ‘social category’ (Banton, 1997) as their research sample. Learners have been given the challenge of applying knowledge in whatever subject area they choose (Degree major) to the specific needs of this group of people as a community service initiative. The project decision to place a strategic focus on the BAC community has been in order to focus research efforts to meet the needs of a particular group of people who fall under the label of ‘black’. This is as opposed to researching on generalised issues relating to ‘blacks’ as a mass and therefore, unwittingly, making racism the focal issue when there are in fact many more generative routes to be taken to work with the social issues ‘black’ people face in contemporary society.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE BAC COMMUNITY
In brief, in 2001 members of the BAC (referred to in the literature as Black Caribbeans) made up 1.0% of the total UK population figure. BAC’s are also variously identified as ‘blacks’, black British’, ‘West Indians’, ‘coloureds’, Afro-Caribbeans and African-Caribbeans. This project has redefined this group based on their historical journey as being British African-Caribbeans (BAC). Members of this group reflect the first large-scale migration to the UK in the 1950’s. BACs are said to be the most integrated of all the ethnic minority groups in the UK (Wikipedia). In general when the literature refers to ‘black people’ it is normally referring to the descendants of enslaved Africans. Other minority groups are referred to as minority ethnic groups as seen in the identifier of ‘black and minority ethnics’. Martinas (1992) identifies the term ‘black’ as first being coined during the British Empire enterprise when enslaved Africans were labelled ‘black’ to distinguish them from European indentured servants. Historically, despite the focus placed on ‘mass immigration’ in the 1950’s, ‘black’ people have lived in England since 1554. Their presence was a reflection of the trading opportunities between Britain and West Africa at that time. By the middle of the eighteenth century, in London alone, there were 18,000 ‘black’ slaves, forming nearly 3 per cent of an estimated population of 650,000.

By 1948 onwards, under the British Nationality Act of 1948, large groups of post-war economic immigrants came from the poorer Commonwealth territories, which included the Caribbean. Under this Act citizens of the British Commonwealth were allowed to enter Britain freely, to find work, to settle and to bring their families. Indeed, many chose to take this option as a result of employer and government led recruitment schemes, e.g. London Transport and the National Health Service. Even when immigration was encouraged for economic reasons, attitudes to newly arrived African-Caribbean people were ambivalent. Currently, in terms of labour market demographics generally, people from minority ethnic groups are more likely than white people to live in low-income households in 2000/1. The economic activity rates of BAC women vary significantly and in 2001/2 they had an economic
activity rates almost as high as White women at 72%. However, young BAC males had very high unemployment rates that ranged between 25-31%. These factors, amongst others, have significant implications for the BAC community as a whole. No doubt, this high unemployment rate is related to the underachievement of BAC males in the school system (London Development Agency, 2004) and is implicated with the plethora of other social problems faced by them as members of this community.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES
Reid-Galloway (2002) supports previous research by Hiro (1971) and Patterson (1973) when she argues that the effects of the BAC migration process, resettlement, and transition (human resource acculturation issues) cannot be underestimated and quotes Franz Fanon, a Black psychiatrist, as observing: “the psychological effects of colonialism as one of the enduring disabling legacies bequeathed to “natives” by their colonial masters.” Fanon believed that the experiences of the descendants of enslaved Africans, like the BAC, cannot be separated from their respective histories as seen in slavery and colonisation. It is also acknowledged that the colonial relationship between England and the Caribbean has shaped the beliefs and the behaviours of BAC people and contributed to feelings of inferiority which are difficult to ‘throw off’ living in England. Such conflicts occur when BACs are confronted with negative stereotypes, finding themselves faced with the choice of either ignoring or confronting them. It is acknowledged that either course is a recipe for distress. Added to the above, ‘black culture’ (a slavery and colonial legacy) has been recognised as a non-generative culture based on Erikson’s (1950) notion of generativity derived as it is from an externally imposed cultural disorder which has taken on a life of its own (McWhorter, 2003). Issues relating to this community can be seen to be on the government agenda in terms of widening participation; aiming higher; community cohesion strategy and so forth. This project aims to contribute to these initiatives by developing knowledge within the community to enhance human capital and the overall social quality (Phillips & Berman, 2003) of the group per se. The focus of the overall research project is that of using academic knowledge to enhance the quality of life of this group of British citizens, as a human resource issue, to enable them to make a more effective contribution to their ethnic group and British society as a whole.

THE STUDENT TASK/CHALLENGE
Students participating in the project have been faced with a significant challenge not only in terms of researching a real world issue with all of the political implications of this type of research (Lee, 1993) but also have engaged in transformative learning through the use of a community of inquiry with the aim of developing their own leadership quotient. Studying philosophical perspectives has been an important component of the research as learners have been encouraged to engage with the knowledge of the ages (i.e. continue the great conversations of the Ancients) to make a community service contribution to the BAC community towards the goal of members of this community becoming ‘free within themselves’. Critical to the overall learning experience is the learners’ individual and collective reflections on the learning experience they have undergone in relation to their academic studies. In order to acknowledge this aspect of the research learners have been asked to present the findings of their research in two sections: a core research project focusing on the particular issue being researched and a thesis research project which gives an account of their individual and group learning experience of engaging with real world political issues (Perry & Zuber-Skerrit, 1992) relating to the BAC lived/researched experience. How can knowledge be used to break the colonial legacy identified above enabling BAC learners to become free within themselves?

Research Projects in 2005/2006 being undertaken, reflecting issues learners are concerned about, are:
How are the life career identity development needs of British African-Caribbean children catered for by the school system? Desired Outcomes: Raise understanding of the issues in schools, BAC social category as a group and consequences for BAC children.

How does the collective self-esteem of members of the BAC social category affect their ability to be effective leaders and entrepreneurs? (Replicating earlier research). Desired Outcome: Make research intervention to raise awareness of social category members about issues relating to Collective Self-Esteem with the aim of transcending them.

What lessons can the BAC community learn from the Jewish community in relation to the education of young BAC males? Desired Outcomes: Enhance the understanding of BAC members of how Jews have worked with their experience of enslavement in order to offer strategies for the short and long term.

An exploration of the gap between BAC qualifications and Organisational Advancement Desired Outcome: Analysis of individual and organisational dynamics as a means of informing BAC members of barriers to overcome and strategies to adopt.

Knowledge-sharing in BAC organisations (The Church) and amongst BAC community members: Desired outcomes: recommendations for why and how knowledge sharing can become a key facet of BAC culture as a means of furthering their interests as a group.

Group dynamics and ethnic/race identity in the BAC social category: Desired outcomes: insights on how this group can move from being a social category to becoming a functioning community.

Developing an inclusive training programme for meeting the needs of ethnic minority managers in the organisational context: Desired Outcomes: Management Training programme designed to be inclusive of the needs of BME individuals in the organisational context.

For more information about the Research Project contact Dr Gloria Gordon on 0207 815 8038 or email bravetg@lsbu.ac.uk.

References:
Harkavy, I (2001) Universities will make the difference in the 21st century, Senate plenary session told, University Times, Volume 33 Number 14, March 22, 2001