



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IS AN EARLY START TO SUCCESS

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I knew at a young age that working with children and teaching was my gift. I have always had the ability to make connections and foster relationships easily. Some may call it being an extrovert or a people person; whatever it is called, it drives my passion for seeing children of color succeed. When passion is coupled with knowledge, magic happens.

I began my work in the early childhood education field while a collegiate athlete at Bowie State University in Bowie, Maryland. During the past 18 years, I have grown in the profession and continue to invest in the development of educators for our youngest learners. I am just one of the 3% of Black men nationwide in the early childhood field.

High-quality early childhood education requires intentional research-based strategies and curricula and an understanding of

how children grow and learn. It is important that children are exposed to this approach in the earliest stages of their development—that is when the brain is the most adaptive. According to Zero to Three, a non-profit organization dedicated to early development research, “During the earliest months and years of life, the architecture of the brain is being built at an unparalleled rate in response to nurturing early experiences.”

The experience of children of color in early childhood education is impacted by systemic racism and bias within the educational system. Gilliam, Reyes and Chin (2005) found that boys were expelled at a rate over 4.5 times that of girls. African Americans attending state-funded pre-kindergarten were about twice as likely to be expelled as Latino and Caucasian children, and over five times as likely to be expelled as Asian-American children.

For early childhood education environments to be diverse and inclusive, we must engage more men in education, specifically early childhood education, because representation matters. Seeing and relating to someone

who looks like you helps to build identity and balance.

I was able to matriculate through three degrees in child studies and early childhood education by obtaining scholarships, which relieved the financial pressure on my family. By creating intentional funding streams and recruitment efforts of men into the field of early childhood education, we can close the opportunity gap that many of our young children face. I believe if we train Black men to go into our classrooms, we can achieve higher educational outcomes for all children.

In life we are given many chances to make the world better when we leave than when we were born. Investment in early childhood education is an opportunity to do just that. Fredrick Douglass said it best: “It is better to teach young boys than to repair broken men.” Many of our societal woes can be curtailed if we start early.

Jamal Berry is a co-convener of DC Men in Early Childhood Education and founder of the Phi Nu Nu Graduate Chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.