

Haiku: Sower

Planting seeds of hope
In soil full of promise
To cultivate change

Spoken Word: Sower of Seeds

“You’ll never be able to stand”

Are the very words spoken to me

In the days of my youth that infected

My dreams, hopes, aspirations, and purpose

For me, these words meant inadequacy, shortcomings

Failure, malfunction, and disappointment

Words like weeds

Contaminating my identity

strength and confidence-restricting my growth

So I half-heartedly stepped into my future

with doubt as my weapon of choice

However, being the Gardner, God was gracious enough to

Plant a seed of faith and hope in me

And because of His great love for me, provided me with sowers’

Better known as “weed killers”

Such as my mother

And my best friend Gerni

People who sowed words of empowerment, courage, and love into
Soil measured as “good for nothing”
by those who considered my very being
unfertile ground
Soil that was unable to bear
good fruits of leadership, talent, and skill

But every so often, God would sprinkle
Drops of additional guidance through the lives of
role models such as
Jamal Powell, who encourages me through his spiritual walk
and passion for his work in youth rehabilitation
Dr. Barnett, who germinates my soil of knowledge through her expertise
In youth development
And Jeffery Canada,
Who instead of just talking about change
Takes action within his own community

They have all taken a part in pruning my educational goals
And now I decree myself a Sower
One who provides other youth the empowerment needed to
Buffer against doubt and failure
Seeing pass their deficits and fostering growth through their talents, strengths,
And future potential through a career in

positive youth development

Utilizing the theories of great scholars such as Bronfenbrenner's

Ecological theory

That a child develops within a series of nested structures

Rooted into multiple levels of environment

So I must take part in the inner most level

Providing seeds of faith, love, and empowerment

I am a Sower

Sower of Seeds

Essay

It's Not About Me

When it comes to defining oneself, it should not be seen as just one dimensional, but comprising of various levels and compartments that are interdependent of one another. Because of the complexity of identity, one must not be limited to one category. As for me, I define who I am through my personal experiences which have shaped my values and qualities.

One of my greatest qualities are my leadership characteristics such as being assertive and passionate. I observed these very characteristics in my mother. Growing up, I believed that if my mother wanted to rule the world, she could. She is a woman who puts her heart and soul in everything that she does and with confidence. She would open her doors to families who came from Haiti and had no place to live. Though we did not have much space, my mother never said "no" and always received people with open arms, which was a trait I truly admired in her. My mother is the one who empowered me to pursue a career in human services, where I would also be able to provide assistance to people who are in distress. Additionally, I witnessed my mother

in her leadership role as an owner of a bakery in Haiti. Through her passion for baking and determination to succeed, she was able to develop a lucrative business and found loyalty within her employees. She possessed leadership qualities that I wanted to mirror in me.

Moreover, I was able to implement the leadership skills, that I gained from my mother, when I became president of the DFY-IT (Drug Free Youth In Town) Club at my high school. As president of the DFY-IT Club, I had the duties of creating events/programs to be held at the school in attempts to bring awareness about substance abuse in youth. I initiated DFY-IT's First Annual Drug Free Show Case that incorporated skits that were created by my vice president and I. Within these skits, I had the opportunity to portray the reasons why many youth dabbled in drugs and how that affects them emotionally, physically, spiritually. Also, as president I had to make sure things relating to DFY-IT were handled in a timely fashion by being aggressive in the things I was passionate about, which was bringing awareness of the issues youth face.

Growing up as an African American I have experienced many stigmas that are associated with being a black youth. I attended schools where a majority of the black girls were pregnant and the boys dabbled in substance abuse and gang violence. Many of my friends, like myself, came from low socioeconomic families and single parent households. I would probably be considered an "at-risk youth" because of my former environment. As defined by The National Recreation and Park Association, "at-risk" youth as those "who are, or have the potential to be influenced by family, environment, or peers; social factors that deter positive mental and social growth" (Brown&Sevcik,1999). Fortunately, I was determined to utilize my potential to gain access into college in hopes of finding a good career. If it was not for a few of my teachers, afterschool programs, and my mom, I would not have been as resilient towards the negativity that was constantly around me. In fact, my surroundings increased my desire to reach out and cause a

positive change in the lives of adolescents through my talents in theater. I want to go back to my community and help the youth that reside there today.

Also, it is my spirituality that makes up my inner core of self and affects every other facet of my identity such as my creativity and knowledge. My spirituality is my greatest value because I feel that without God I am nothing and my life would have no meaning. The distinct incident that made me curious about my spirituality/faith is the conversation that I had with my best friend in high school. It was not until I witnessed how this friend talked about God with such intimacy that I sought to find about who He was and His importance in my life.

The day I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior was a pivotal moment for me because my whole perception on life changed at that very instant. Perception is very important because it is what helps formulate views on different subjects and used to make sense of one's surroundings. I no longer view my purpose in life as being self-centered and receiving accolades for my every achievement. I have come to believe that God is the ruling factor in my life and has a say in everything that I do or want to do. I make it my business to include Him in every aspect of my life, whether it is in academics, extracurricular activities, or daily decisions.

Furthermore, I define success as being able to find something that stimulates an individual not only academically but also creatively. I first discovered my creative side when I became a majorette on my high school's marching band. As captain of the team, I had the opportunity to create the themes, routines, and costumes, with little resistance from my band director, Mr. Beckford. He provided me with the space and opportunity to construct and implement whatever I wanted into a routine. He was always a source of encouragement and inspiration for me during my high school years. As a result, I believe that children should have a creative outlet, where academics are not their only focus. Indulging in activities such as drama, dancing, and painting

are prime examples of tapping into one's creativity. I believe that just focusing on academics places limitations on a person's success in life. Fortunately, the Arts not only aids with social development, but also with academics. In fact, a study that was published in *Champions of Change*, states that participation in theater classes, performances, and clubs aids in reading skills and language skills. Drama can help with the continual development of reading comprehension skills in youth (Fiske, 1999).

Therefore, my ultimate goal is to open up a non-profit Christian theater that targets "at-risk" youth, specifically in the inner cities. This is because I feel that it will be a great protective factor for the youth, particularly the African-American youth. Protective factors as defined by Joyce West Stevens, are "dynamic aspects of living... that interact with stress to buffer hazardous situations"(p.188). At this non-profit theater children will be able to avoid those situations that may be seen as stressful and detrimental to their future by taking part in the various activities that will be offered. These activities will serve as buffers because they will encourage self-expression through positive creative means and provide the youth with other outlets to explore their talents, interests and develop a positive self-concept (Carlton & Moore, 1966). The youth will be involved in writing the plays, directing them, and even acting in the plays. Through writing, acting or directing these plays and skits, the youth will gain a sense of self-awareness because they will be able to delve into past traumas and find meaning and hopefully closure. According to the American Alliance for Theatre and Education, playwriting and performing existing works can help build communication skills and self-esteem in adolescents. Moreover, the act of performing can be beneficial in helping a youth identify their potential for success (AATE, 2009).

A theatre-centered program is a great creative approach to fostering positive youth development because there will be a focus on the youths' strengths. William Damon, author of *What is Positive Youth Development*, defines this term as "focusing on each and every child's unique talents, strengths, and future potential" (p.13). If we can cease solely focusing on a youth's shortcoming and promote growth in areas such as their talents, we can encourage the youth to live a lifestyle that is profitable to them socially, academically, and emotionally. In the meantime, as I work towards my ultimate goal of creating my own organization, I want to become a teacher and instruct others on how to use theatre to cultivate a positive self-concept in "at-risk" youth. Therefore, my aspirations are to go to graduate school and receive a Masters in theater education in hopes of becoming a professor in the art of theatre.

My inspiration to open up my own non-profit has come from Paul and Sheryl Russell, who created a non-profit Christian theater that targets the youth in different states such as Texas, Colorado, Illinois, and Georgia. They had a dream and brought it into fruition through faith, courage, and determination. In addition, another program that I admire and model my own program after is the Each One Reach One program. This program is geared towards at-risk youth in alternative schools and incarceration facilities. The Each One Reach One program has given the at-risk youth a voice through play writing and performance (EORO, 2001). The program's way of helping the youth gain an internal sense of self-control and confidence is consistent with Herman & Tucker's self-empowerment theory (SET). The SET claims that African American children are suffering from a sense of powerlessness and that in order to combat this issue and its negative effects (e.g., poor academic achievement), the youth must be taught to achieve under any sociopolitical conditions through community based involvement (Herman & Tucker, 2002). Though this theory is geared towards African American youth, it can be applied to youth

in general because many youth can possibly be wrestling with thoughts of inadequacy when it comes to academics and life success.

An individual I believe is applying the self-empowerment theory in his on work and that I consider being a role model is Geoffrey Canada. He saw the issues facing the youth and their families in his city and took action by creating an organization called the Harlem Children Zone (HCZ). The organization provides the youth with programs that equip them with necessary tools to thrive in life. The HCZ works to improve the quality of life for the Children and families of the community (The HCZ Project, 2009). In Geoffrey Canada's book, *Reaching Up for Manhood*, Canada gives a powerful report on what boys face in their journey of becoming men in the inner-city. Personally, this book provides me with a vivid description of the issues boys face in the inner city and holds me responsible for finding a solution to the problem of what society defines as manhood to the youth. As a result, I would like to implement Canada's suggestions in my own organization for inner city youth that deals with helping boys attain a healthy self-image through the arts.

Another individual I view as a role model not only educationally, but also spiritually would be Jamal Powell. As a Juvenile Probation Officer, Mr. Powell assists in the rehabilitation of the youth through a supportive relationship: this is what I would like to do through my own organization. Spiritually, Mr. Powell encourages me to live a life in compliance with the statutes of God and to always put God first. Lastly, I also considered Dr. Rosemary Barnett an educational role model. Through her specialization in youth development issues, Dr. Barnett helps to improve low-performing schools in communities deemed "at-risk" (Dr. Rosemary Barnett, 2009). Like me, her goal is to promote positive youth development through her work.

All in all, I chose to major in Family, Youth, and Community Sciences because I want to help the youth succeed in every arena of their lives. So my desire is to provide a program where they will find positive role models, love, and encouragement to chase after their aspirations with the utmost tenacity. My whole mission is not about what I can do for myself, but how can I use my talents and gifts to help others reach their full potential.

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