

Generating Genius

Figures suggest that there are a significant number of black boys underachieving at school. Headliners reporter Ashleigh Rennalls-Griffiths, 15, went to see meet young people on a project that is trying to reverse that trend.

Over the years we have witnessed a number of black boys underachieving in the British education system and this figure continues to rise each year. It seems as though no-one is doing much about it, including the ministers and police makers. This is where projects like Generating Genius step in.

Generating Genius is a charity with a mission to encourage and develop under-privileged but talented boys from diverse backgrounds into scientific professions such as engineering, medicine, bio-technology and life sciences.

They recruit boys from all over the UK by advertising in national newspapers and finding boys in schools who are prepared to commit to their three-year programme. The participants take part in master classes and visit university science departments where they get the chance to do more challenging experiments. Some of them even spent the summer of 2005 at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica.



Jamal, Sheridan and Marcus from Generating Genius told Headliners how the project is making a difference to black boys in Britain.

Ashleigh: It was quite hard to find some up to date statistics but did you know that 70% of African-Caribbean boys left school with less than five GCSE's in 2003?

Jamal and Sheridan: No

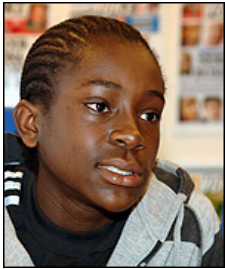
A: Why do you think that is?

J: It's because they lose their ambition and the need to learn and get a good education. In the end they start to rely on the streets and think they can only have a good life on the streets.

Marcus: As they grow up they want to be in gangs and they get distracted at school and stop working.

S: I agree. They are dragged into the gang business and start to depend on them to get through life. They're not looking to get money through working they're looking for it the easy way, from the streets.

A: Statistics show that at the age of five black boys are at the same level as white and Asian boys, however by 16 less than half of them gain five GCSE'S. Do you think Generating Genius has inspired you not to become one of these statistics?



J: I was already achieving highly but the project has shown me what black scientists can achieve and so it has helped me to open more doors and has created more career paths for me.

S: Before the project I wasn't doing that well in school and I didn't do any work. But now I've seen what I can do. I've seen my potential and I've seen that I could be making money and going into higher places.

A: When you joined most of you had to commit to the project for five years, now it's only a three-year commitment. Do you think that the five-year commitment was too long or do you think it was all worthwhile and why?

J: It's worthwhile because you're not going to change overnight. You could be doing well in the first two years and then slip up.

M: The project keeps us on track as we're going through school. If it wasn't there then we could fall back and go into something wrong.

A: Has the scheme provoked a greater interest in science for you and do you think it should be promoted more around the UK?

J: It has made me like science more but the way they advertise the programme is a bit restricted. If they advertised it in the news where everyone would see it they would reach more people.

A: Why do you think they chose boys and not girls to participate in this scheme and is it fair?

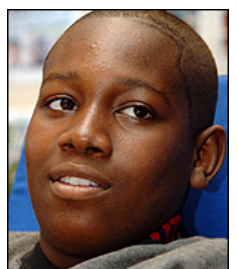
J: I think it's because they think black girls are more sensible and black boys are underachieving more. But at the same time they're still both underachieving; if black girls are getting four GCSE's and a black boy is getting three, they're still not making their target of at least getting five.

M: I think they chose boys because they are watching girls and getting distracted. Girls find it easier to keep on track because they don't get into gangs.

S: Boys are dragged into certain things like fights and they have to have a reputation and stuff. It's easier for girls because they don't have girl gangs and don't have anything to distract them from school.

A: But have you noticed that recently a lot of girls are getting to be like boys and are starting to carry 'shanks'. Don't you think this scheme could help girls as much as it's helping you?

J: That is true because there are a lot of teenage pregnancies and girls are having sex at 13. The issues are different between boys and girls but girls are still doing things that aren't right.



M: The scheme should be for boys and girls because girls can go off track just as much as boys.

A: Do you think role models are important for black boys to have? Do you think that having a father at home helps?

J: Having a father at home would help but to me it doesn't matter as long as I've got my mum. But role models are better than looking up to an 'oldah' who is big on the streets and might only be 19 or 20. He can't be that good of a role model if he's on the streets and not at university.

M: I think you should have a role model at home, like I've got my mum and mums are good because they cook for you. But I don't think I need a (male) role model, it doesn't make any difference to me.

A: So for you personally you don't need a role model but do you think that black boys in general need role models that are male figures?



J: Yeah, because when boys look up to their mum they don't learn how to be a man because your mum can't teach you that. That's why male role models come in handy.

M: Everyone needs a role model because everyone needs someone to look up to.

S: I don't really need a role model because I have grown up just being with my mum. I look up to her because she's motivating me to do this project. One day I will bring home some money and make her proud and it'll be because of all the things she has done for me.

A: Are you doing this scheme to make your parents proud or are you doing this for yourself?

M: I'm doing this for myself and my family because when I have children I don't want to say I was a bin man. I want to say I was a scientist or something and for them to have a good role model instead of them wanting to be a bin man like their dad.

S: I want to do this for myself so I can look back on it and say "that was me, I did that. Look how far I got and now I'm in a good job and I've got money".

A: Do you think that seeing people in high achieving jobs being predominately white inspires you to want to do something like that?

M: It inspires me to be one of a kind because you don't see many black people in Parliament. So it inspires black people to become the first black prime minister.

S: Being a black person living in England means it's harder to get a high class job so I have to work even harder to get one of those jobs.

A: After seeing other African-Caribbean boys in Jamaica striving towards their dreams and becoming high achievers, did it influence you to become more ambitious?

J: Yeah, they have to work even harder to get an education and they have to travel very far to get it. They sometimes have to work as well but we don't have to because our parents provide for us. So when I look at them and then look at kids on the streets here and how they waste their education, when others would die for this opportunity, it just makes me think how grateful I am.

M: Seeing a black person that's done well in school does make you ambitious. It means you can bring the statistics up and make them better for black boys.

S: Seeing another black person get a good job makes me want to do it so I can have other young black people looking up at me and saying "I wish I could do that."

Ashleigh's thoughts after the interview:

After speaking to the participants of Generating Genius I was really inspired by how well they had done. However, I did wonder why there wasn't a programme for girls because we are just as important as boys.

I do recognise, however there might be more distractions for boys right now because of gangs and drugs. From the responses, it certainly looks like the charity is helping to give black boys in Britain a better education and better chances in life. It's just a shame the British education system doesn't confront these problems themselves and provide programmes like Generating Genius so that all black boys and black girls have the opportunity to do something like this.

About this story

This story was produced by Ashleigh Rennalls-Griffiths, 15, and contributed to by Jordan Nisbett, 13, and Ebony Goodin, 16. It was published in [Young Voices](#) Magazine May 2007.

Photographs courtesy of Colin Patterson of Young Voices Magazine.

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