

CREATING THE “BUZZ” AND THE STING

Imagine what it would be like for Black youth to want, at a deep, visceral level, mathematics, science, and technology (MST) academic excellence, not, necessarily because you can get a good job or be a good



person, but because you feel it in your gut. Think of the breakdancing phenomenon, for example, and imagine what it would be like for MST thinking and activity to get into youth culture at that level. Imagine the power waiting to be activated when mathematics, science, and technology learning and achievement get in urban Black youth culture at a similarly embraced level as hip-hop or basketball. How powerful!

There are, indeed, socioeconomic implications for mathematics, science, and technology competency, given the information, technology-based demands for empowered participation in the global community. Significantly, many Black youth are not motivated by dreams of careers in professions based upon competencies in mathematics, science, and technology. This trend is heavily influenced by the nature of the marketing that youth are typically exposed to, advertising campaigns in which images of Black people success predominately glorify excellence in athletics and entertainment, to the near exclusion of achievement in other professional arenas. At the same time, many Black youth accept, abide by, and enforce the stereotype that if you are Black you are not as academically talented as Whites and Asians. Their school experiences become self-fulfilling prophecies that reinforce and perpetuate these stereotypes. In addition, the set of images associated with being a “mathematician” or “scientist” do not fit a Black profile in the minds of a significant number of Black youth.

The work of CrossPulse Consultants is organized around the mission of reenergizing African American communities around excellence in mathematics, science, and technology (MST) learning. Excellence messages are the mantras that we believe will find resonance in these communities. We believe that efforts to “close the achievement gap” still set the bar too low; a subtly communicated message behind closing “the gap” is that Black achievement is tied to and limited by ceilings of White and/or Asian achievement.

We are in the process of planning and organizing a campaign, “Creating the Buzz and the Sting” which targets this aim of excellence. One of the key premises for Creating the Buzz and the Sting is that critical, key factors for how Black youth perform academically are dispositional and attitudinal in nature. Curricular and pedagogical initiatives that might otherwise be effective wind up being undermined because these fundamental considerations are not directly addressed.

THE BUZZ

We believe that aspiration towards success mathematics, science and technology learning needs to be “marketed” to African American youth, and those who guide and support them, with the same strategic sophistication as occurs with marketing sports and music success. We are working collaboratively to develop a multimedia campaign that meets individuals where they are, that speaks “to” not “at”, that energizes and empowers, and that points in the direction of taking action. The compelling aim is to reclaim the goal of academic excellence for Black communities – so that it, among other aspirations, is perceived to be a “Black Thing.”

Creating a “buzz” around mathematics, science, and technology excellence does not come through “dumbing down” content or lowering expectations in the name of attempting to make mathematics, science, and technology hip, cool, exciting, fun and/or engaging. The “buzz” that we envision will result from being able to communicate messages about mathematics, science, and technology that resonate with the core that responds to creativity, challenge, and individualized expression.

THE STING

What happens when young people and those who guide and support them are energized around mathematics, science, and technology achievement? What happens when more and more young people aspire towards academic excellence and demand quality programs? “The Sting” involves acting upon “the Buzz”. Oftentimes the buzz is expressed in words (buzz words) but not in the sting of practice. The sting takes commitment, effort, and a willingness to stretch, evolve and transform. It involves identifying, developing, and/or coordinating with programs and structures that enact and reinforce high expectations (see Jatibola Society description). In order for a Black community campaign around academic excellence to be effective and sustainable, it must be situated in the context of thoughtful community, school, and business partnerships, guided by leadership and fueled by resources from the community itself.

THE REACH

Although the focus of Creating the Buzz and the Sting is on mathematics, science, and technology excellence in Black communities, the potential impact and effects extend well beyond these communities. The influential power of urban Black youth, though well recognized and understood in the marketing community, is undervalued and under acknowledged in the broader society and is typically framed in auras of fear, danger, and undesirability. Urban Black youth are trendsetters in the popular culture arena. Undoubtedly, if and when mathematics, science, and technology excellence is embraced by this segment of the society, the reverberations will be palpable throughout youth culture as a whole.



PARTICIPATE

We are seeking partner organizations to participate in various aspects of the design, implementation, and sustainment of Creating the Buzz and the Sting. Potential ways of participating in Creating the Buzz and the Sting include fundraising, providing mathematics, science and technology related teaching and learning products and services; community/family advocacy and empowerment support services, and; membership on a Creating the Buzz and the Sting Steering Committee. For further information, contact John Belcher (617) 275-7392, jbelcher@crosspulsconsultants.com.