

Chapter 10

Towards a Mentoring Model That Enhances Academic, Social, and Cultural Capital in Turbulent Times: Academically At-Risk Student Persisting

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ABSTRACT

Academically at-risk students may doubt their ability to persist and succeed because of some or all of the following: socioeconomic, low self-esteem, identity crises, negative family histories, socio-emotional concerns, poor living situations, or negative messages about school and education. Currently, the aforementioned issues are further compounded by turbulent times, which include but are not limited to a pandemic that disproportionately affects people of color and the impoverished, along with continued civil unrest and demands for rapid societal change. Therefore, this population would benefit from the enhancement of its academic, social, and cultural capital. In order to accomplish those goals simultaneously, the authors propose a mentoring model that integrates aspects of advising, tutoring, mentoring, peer-to-peer interaction, metacognition, positive psychology, current events, and emotional wellness to support academically at-risk students in their pursuit of academic and personal excellence.

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INTRODUCTION

According to *The Glossary of Education Reform*, **at-risk** describes “students or groups of students who are considered to have a higher probability of failing academically or dropping out of school” (At-risk Definition, 2013). Academically at-risk is defined by Larose and Tarabulsky’s (2005) as “youth [or students] who have already experienced failure or poor grades for a significant portion of their academic histories [and] students with poor grades in a given school level (e.g. high school) but that are sufficient to give them access to higher levels of schooling (e.g. college) ...” (p. 441). More succinctly stated, and in a broader context, academically at-risk students would be those students at risk of failing, for any reason. Furthermore, the students who are at-risk could also encounter various situations that require their attention outside of the academic halls and have a negative impact on their academic pursuits, such as “...homelessness, incarceration, pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence, transiency... learning disabilities, low test scores, disciplinary problems, grade [course] retention or other learning-related factors...” per *The Glossary of Education Reform* (At-Risk Definition, 2013). Moreover, students who are labeled academically at-risk are more likely to believe they have an inability to attain academic success. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that academically at-risk students may exhibit more gaps than most students, with needs that are more complex, especially when additional external factors further challenge their way of thinking and their very ability to not only thrive but also survive.

Their academic journeys are even more complicated by what we call current *turbulent times*. Specifically, we as a human society are “...in turbulent times.” The New York Times June 2020 article eloquently capitulates that we are in 2 crises [that] convulse a nation: a pandemic and police violence (Healy & Searcy, 2020). Due to those two converging crises, all elements of our society, from the macro to micro, have changed in record time. For instance, education came to a standstill, as schools closed, and colleges and universities shut down. If those schools did not close, they immediately transitioned to virtual learning, which many were not accustomed to that methodology of teaching and learning. People were told to socially distance with restrictions to only go out for needed essential items. Businesses and stores closed or transitioned to new business models, which caused many to become underemployed or unemployed. People were forced to “work at home” for unlimited amounts of time with family members present, finding themselves awkwardly trying to balance family life with work-life that in “normal times” were spent separately and outside of the home (i.e., work, school). Those were times that were dubiously labeled, “lockdown”. Adding to those rapid societal changes, there began an uprising of protests across the country, largely peaceful but met with not such a peaceful response, that called for an end to systemic oppression of people of color and police brutality. The protests that people thought would last a week or two lasted for months. People woke up daily to news reports that another shooting took place, lootings occurred in their city, law enforcement mandated curfews, and standoffs between protestors and those employed to keep the peace, all while facing a national and global pandemic. Needless to say, it was unsettling and jarring at the least. Then, delving into another layer, there was a contentious political battle in the United States, that often bore the signs of ugliness and resentment, that seemed to create a larger divide than ever before.

Social, Cultural and Academic Capital and the Academically At-Risk Student

Admittedly, the picture painted above is not one that is glimmering with hope or positivity for anyone, especially not for academically at-risk students who already are dealing with their own set of issues that

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