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# Retention, Mentoring and the Mythological Need for the Other: Specifically Designed, With Urban Youth in Mind

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# **Retention, Mentoring and the Mythological Need for the Other: Specifically Designed, With Urban Youth in Mind**

## **Abstract**

*Through mythological stories, participants are given assistance in their personal journeys. Stories focus on mentoring, long-term gratification, the rewards of persistence and the archetypal need to blossom. The specific group process has consistently created introspection and provided a sense of encouragement for the participant to speak to their calling.*

## **Gene Kwame Scruggs**

Consultant, The Akron Public School's Saturn Program and Doctoral Student, The Union Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio

The philosophy of this process is based upon the belief that all human beings come to this earth to fulfill a purpose. As one travels through life, one searches for meaning. Within this search one normally is provided assistance that comes in the form of a guide, a mentor. This mentor is there to assist one in recognizing one's genius within. Our belief is that instilled within each human is the innate capacity to succeed. Similar to a plant, these innate capacities may lie dormant unless put into an environment that is conducive to its growth. Often times, people of color in predominantly white institutions feel as if this environment is not conducive to their growth. Through the use of mythological stories, participants are shown that they themselves are on the hero/heroine's journey and this unknown environment, provides an ideal setting for their growth.

While conducting my groups I am constantly reminded of the extremes that accompany emotions during any transitional stage, a liminal stage of living in between, neither here, nor there. Many students are left to wrestle with this tumultuous period alone, if not alone, then with others who themselves are cautiously tiptoeing through this unfamiliar terrain. These students stand at the crossroads where one must make a decision as to which road to travel. Oftentimes without a guide or any visible evidence to suggest that success is possible, students will succumb to the enormity of the pressure and forgo the remainder of the journey. The journey can be made much simpler with a guide and a host of others who are willing to share their stories of success, failure, hope and disillusionment. Groups that provide safe boundaries offer an environment in which individuals may explore more in depth the intensity of their feelings. Simply stated, a safe environment furnishes students with an opportunity to discuss what is presently being experienced in their lives. In the words of my "at-risk" youth, "That is love."

Within this process there are three primary objectives, the first: *To provide stories that stimulate discussion and induce introspection.* This will be accomplished using age-related stories with a focus upon developmental issues pertinent to the learners' developmental stage. Of primary importance is the need to recognize the benefits of long-term gratification and the rewards of persistence. In addition, the learners will participate in discussions that will allow them to express their feelings, apprehensions and concerns

with their developmental stage in life as well as the future.

The second objective: *To provide learners with an introduction into concepts of rites of passage and its relationship to human development and overcoming obstacles.* Within these stories chosen are concepts of rites of passage, i.e., separation, trials and the return. These concepts will be discussed for more comprehension, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. Stories with a focus upon initiation will be discussed in order to display how other societies assist their youth in becoming adults and to allude to the importance of their commitment to themselves and society.

The final primary objective is: *To understand the importance of a mentor and perseverance.* Within this parameter, the common motif of "The Mythological Need for the Other" will be discussed with priority given to archetypes. Stories with a focus upon perseverance (Le., retention) will be told and discussed.

To summarize, this process is designed to provide participants with a group environment that is safe enough to explore issues related to their developmental stage. Major emphasis is placed upon the "Mythological Need for the Other," longterm gratification and the rewards of persistence. Its intent is to ingrain in the mind and soul of its participants the importance of staying in the fire and not shrinking back. It is geared toward increasing retention in higher education and will supply the participants with a new positive outlook and philosophy in relation to their archetypal journey, a journey that one does not have to travel alone, for this process serves as a guide. Up-to-date this process has proven to be a total success within urban schools, with male high-school "drop-outs" and the adult population.

## **Presenter**

Gene Kwame Scruggs is enrolled in the Ph.D. program at The Union Institute in Cincinnati, Ohio where he is working toward completing his terminal degree in Developmental and Child Psychology. Kwame holds a Master of Arts degree in Mythological Studies with degree specialization in Depth Psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute in Santa Barbara, California where he studied under internationally renown professors in their respective fields. Kwame also holds Bachelors and Masters of Science degrees in Technical Education with an emphasis in Guidance and Counseling from The University of Akron. In addition, Kwame has completed all the course work for a Masters in Community Counseling from The University of Akron. Kwame was formally initiated into the ADAN system of life cycle development (rites of passage) in May of 1993 and has conducted numerous workshops and training in the field of rites of passage.

For the past three years Kwame has worked as a consultant and is presently under contract with The Akron Public School's Saturn Program. This alternative school is in lieu of expulsion and provides an ideal environment for Kwame to perfect his opus. There he collaborates with suspended students during their tenure (transitional state) before returning to their "home" school. Kwame also facilitates support groups for "at-risk" adolescent youth and male high school "drop-outs" in Akron and Cleveland, Ohio.

Kwarne has also performed numerous staff in-services in Akron, Cleveland and Cincinnati charter schools, employing mythological stories as his means of communication. Prior to this position he spent five years as Staff Counselor for The University of Akron's Academic Achievement Program assisting students in their transitions through middle, high school and college. There he also coordinated and presented parent and student workshops, facilitated support groups along with teaching classes in Mythological Studies and Knowledge of Self to seventh and eleventh grade students respectively. Kwame has also conducted support groups for the Oriana House, a community correctional agency, where he utilized mythological stories, drumming, counseling techniques and concepts of rites of passage as a means of healing past, present and possible future psychological wounds.