

Individual Study: Diversity in Educator Perceptions of a Black Family

"Upon matriculating at Connecticut College I was overwhelmed by the possible academic directions that a liberal arts education offered. Coming in with a diversity of interests from art history and dance to government and psychology, I thought it impossible to reconcile my unique aspirations. On the first day of freshman year, I read a description for the introductory Human Development class and thought "this is perfect." Anxious and confused about making a decision and declaring my major, I frantically walked into Bolles House looking for anyone who could help. It was that day that I found my home at Connecticut College. Not only did I discover that my studies in Human Development (HMD) could incorporate all of my interests as they related to children and families but I also found a community of welcoming, supportive individuals and a faculty who value all of their students as intelligent thinkers and peers.

Throughout my four years of college I was able to learn about children and family social policies, individual differences in development, adolescent psychology, the learning experiences of children in different environments, and multicultural studies all within my HMD major. I realized that the interdisciplinary nature of the HMD major aligned all of my interests under the unifying objective of advocating for all children and families. The service learning component of many of my classes allowed me to put all of my knowledge into practice and has significantly contributed to the development of my passions within the realm of human development. I also joined the HMD Student Advisory Board in order to become more involved. My commitment to the department led me to the Student Advisory Board co-chair position, working with my good friend and fellow HMD leader Kate Kenly. Together we strove to enhance the communication of exactly what HMD entails and to boost the unity of the department in its entirety.

In the HMD department, I was given the opportunity to analyze real-life data. I began my individual study, under the guidance of and collaboration with Professor Dunlap, in January of my senior spring semester. The study examined the relationships between service providers' demographic and personality characteristics and their perceptions of the interactions and communication patterns of an African American family depicted in a feature film. The findings contribute to the growing research on issues of diversity by considering the elements that predict particular conceptions or misconceptions of families with a diversity of backgrounds. I was so enthralled by this study because I felt as though I was really putting my HMD education to use while working on something that might inevitably affect change in the fields of social service and education for children and families from diverse backgrounds. I will be forever impacted by this research. I will use all that I have learned from the findings of my individual study and multicultural research as I embark on my own work with children and families.

For the next two years I will be teaching in a low income elementary school in New York City with the Teach For America program. I will employ my cultural diversity training, including my research with Professor Dunlap and my knowledge of theory, to generate the most optimal, accessible learning environments for my students and their families. Although I am not sure of the exact career path that I will take following my two year commitment to the program, the integration of all of my interests under the Human Development title has catalyzed my commitment to advocating for the rights and equal treatment of all children regardless of race, developmental ability, gender, etc. All of the courses that I have taken and the experiences that I have had, despite at first seeming irreconcilable, will allow me to best influence change for all children using a variety of perspectives and the breadth of knowledge that my fantastic professors and mentors have provided me."