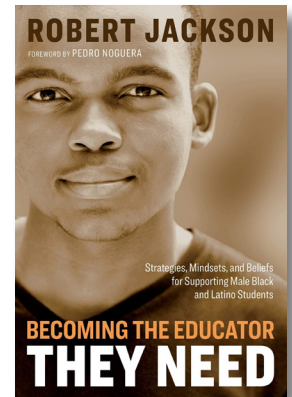


ASCD® LEADERSHIP SUMMARIES for EDUCATORS

Becoming the Educator They Need

Strategies, Mindsets, and Beliefs for Supporting Male Black and Latino Students

by **Robert Jackson**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In America, Black and Latino males are overrepresented in categories typically associated with hardship and defeat. They experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment, incarceration, and homicide, and many of them are so disenfranchised (approximately 34 percent of Black males between the ages of 16 and 34) that they are literally “missing” from key census data because they are neither working, in school or college, or in the criminal justice system.

Becoming the Educator They Need by Robert Jackson is a focused guide to engaging, inspiring, and teaching young Black and Latino males to be successes. Drawing upon his life experience and his work as an educator and advisor to schools throughout the country, Jackson outlines strategies and practices that can help counter the negative trends and alter the life trajectories of young Black and Latino males. For those in search of solutions, seeking to make a difference in the lives of all students, especially young men, this will be an insightful resource.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to better understand the world Black and Latino males face each day, within the school and outside of it.
- Culturally aware teaching practices for leading these young men.
- Core beliefs, mindsets, and values necessary to best serve your Black and Latino male students.
- How to develop strong, healthy relationships among you, your students, and your staff.



Based on *Becoming the Educator They Need: Strategies, Mindsets, and Beliefs for Supporting Male Black and Latino Students* by Robert Jackson. Published by Soundview, Inc. ® (ISSN 0747-2196), • Copyright © 2019 by ASCD. All rights reserved. © 2022 by ASCD. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. • To subscribe, visit www.ascd.org or contact ASCD, 1703 N Beauregard Street, Alexandria, VA 22311.

Introduction

How often do you tell your Black and Latino male students that, despite their circumstances or their backgrounds, they will be success stories? How often do you affirm these young men? How often do you appoint them as leaders in your building? How many of them know that their lives do matter and that what is said about them in the media isn't necessarily true? How many of them do you call your "babies" or your "kids?" Speaking positive affirmations to students every day can truly help you build relationships with students and help educators and administrators connect with these young men.

If all successful people were honest with themselves, they would be able to think back to that one caring adult or mentor who took the time to help them discover their potential, help them know that it's OK to dream about their future, and understand that it is OK to make bad decisions and how to bounce back from adversity. They wouldn't be able to share the story of their lives without remembering that one vital, unforgettable person who taught them how to be better versions of themselves and was relentless about their success.

Cultural Awareness: Understanding the Realities of Life for Black and Latino Males

We live in a world where many young Black and Latino males gravitate toward gangs because the gang members treat them more like family than their own parents do.

According to the National Gang Center, in 2011, 46.2 percent of gang members were Hispanic or Latino and 35.3 percent were Black (as compared to only 11.5 percent white and 7 percent classified as "other") (2018). A disproportionate number of Black and Latino youth also live in poverty: in 2017, roughly 33 percent of Black youth and 26 percent of Latino youth lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty level (Anne E. Casey Foundation). When students living in poverty are arrested and booked (often unfairly), bonds can be set as high as \$3,000 to \$5,000, which they can't afford to pay. One in three Black males and one in six Latino males born in or after the year 2001 will spend time in prison at some point in his life (The Sentencing Project, 2017), a status quo that the private prison system does much to exacerbate.

Private prisons in the United States make an annual profit of more than \$3.3 billion for incarcerating individuals (Cohen,

2015)—most of whom have black and brown faces, and many of whom have committed minor offenses. Even more disturbing is the fact that Black and Latino males are also disproportionately at risk of being murdered. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, homicide is the leading cause of death for Black males ages 15 to 24 (2018a) and the second leading cause of death for Hispanic males ages 15 to 34 (2018b). These numbers are disturbing.

Factors that Specifically Affect Male Youths of Color

Invisibilization

Invisibilization is the act of seeing a person or situation as invisible, as not important, and without breadth or depth. Think of how the public at large reacts to the police killing of an unarmed Black or Latino man as compared to a dog being mistreated (Michael Vick served more than two years in prison for his participation in a dog-fighting ring that led to the deaths of several dogs).

Marginalization

Marginalization is when someone is relegated to a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group due to a given characteristic like race or ethnicity. This occurs in the housing market, workforce, legal system, and educational system. When two students of different races commit the same offense at the same age and receive different punishment, that's marginalization.

Pre-criminalization

This is the tendency to perceive Black and Latino males as criminals when they haven't done anything wrong. If society and educators continue to look at students as if they are criminals, they will unconsciously treat them as such.

Stereotype Threat

This refers to the fear of affirming a negative stereotype associated with one's race, gender, ethnicity, or cultural group. According to psychologists Claude Steele, Joshua Aronson, and Steven Spencer, stereotype threat causes anxiety in students during tests and therefore plays a significant part in widening the achievement gap.

Colorism

Colorism is prejudice or discrimination within an ethnic group against individuals with darker complexions. For Black Americans, this began during slavery (during which

time Blacks with lighter complexions were given the opportunity to work in the house, while those with darker complexions were forced to work in the fields, resulting in a division within the race). This phenomenon is common within ethnic groups in places where Europeans imposed racial hierarchies featuring themselves at the top.

The Myth of Color Blindness

Some educators believe that they are colorblind and therefore don't need to increase their cultural awareness. Color blindness is the racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity, notes Monica T. Williams (2011). Most Black and Latino males, who regularly encounter difficulties due to race, experience colorblind ideologies quite differently. Colorblindness creates a society that denies their negative racial experiences, rejects their cultural heritage, and invalidates their unique perspectives (Williams, 2011).

It is generally white educators accustomed to a life of privilege who claim color blindness and do not realize the disservice they do to students of color who likely don't enjoy a life of privilege. By refusing to expand their understanding of the students who most need their support, they are missing the opportunity to inspire those students and possibly change the course of their lives.

Culturally Aware Teaching Practices

Far too many educators haven't bridged the gap between themselves and their Black and Latino male students. They can't run down a list of these students' successes because they haven't been able to connect with them, despite being in the perfect position to serve as leaders and change agents in their lives. The disconnect, detrimental to students, is detrimental to teachers as well, leaving many feeling unfulfilled, burned out, and even resentful of the students who need them most.

The Six Core Values for Teaching Black and Latino Males

Love

Show your students that you love them:

- Love yourself enough to know that it is OK to care about your students' well-being.

- Love your students enough to make every effort to provide them with the best education possible.
- Love is a choice, not a feeling. Choose to love your students daily.
- Love always seeks the welfare of the other person; it does not seek to hurt people.
- Love sets aside your own beliefs, desires, and preferences and puts those of your students first.

Trust

Trust is:

- Taking your student's word as truth.
- Acting in ways that make students feel they can place their trust in you.
- Giving a student a chance to get it right and believing he can do it.
- Leading by example by keeping your word and following through.
- Making recommendations with a student's input instead of issuing demands.

Fairness

Fairness is:

- Treating all students in the same manner, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, or behavior issues.
- Not showing favoritism.
- Viewing all students as having the potential to do well.
- Giving all students the opportunity to be their best.
- Playing by the rules and not changing them to make it convenient for someone else.
- Listening with an open mind.

Support

Support your students by:

- Honoring their choices and voices.
- Gaining an understanding of their truths.
- Offering encouragement.
- Listening without judging.
- Valuing their opinions.
- Having a short memory when they make mistakes.

Accountability

Accountability is:

- Accepting responsibility for your behaviors and attitudes toward your Black and Latino male students and expecting your students to do the same.
- Admitting when you have made a mistake or have wrongfully accused or judged someone and expecting your students to do the same.
- Creating a mission statement for your building or classroom that is inclusive of all your students.
- Giving a concise explanation for your actions that helps everyone involved reach a resolution.
- For administrators, being responsible for the actions of the staff you hired.

Safety

Safety is:

- Refraining from intimidating and manipulating your students.
- Being aware of and respecting the physical space of your students.
- Providing interventions for bullies and the students affected by their behavior.
- Recognizing students affected by trauma.
- Protecting and helping emotional students learn to control their emotions and giving them steps to deal with their temperamental issues.

Core Beliefs and Mindsets of a Culturally Responsive Educator

If your students described you in one word, what would that one word be? Loving? Strict? Passive? Stubborn? Helpful? Angry? Abrasive? Nice? Sweet? Mean? Nonchalant?

Ask yourself, “How do my students view me?” If your students view you as mean and abrasive, they will more than likely shut down and not want to learn from you. Maybe you know that your students see you as strict, abrasive, or boring, but you think students need strong discipline and boundaries to ensure learning (which is not always the case). As an educator, I felt that I was too strict at times because I judged everyone by the acts of a few. Maybe because there is so much stress in education and so much content to cover,

you feel it’s OK to be strict, abrasive, or boring. Maybe you’ve heard other educators say it’s OK because “those kids” have trouble learning anyway.

It is imperative to turn your gaze inward and question what limiting and biased beliefs you have about students and teaching that are disadvantaging kids. It’s not always the students.

Sometimes it’s the teachers.

Who Are You?

When someone asks you who you are, you should be able to answer immediately. Take a moment and write down eight to 10 words that describe you.

Know Your Why

You must know your “why.” Your reasons for teaching will help you get through the tough days. When you understand who you are and why you teach, you become more patient, you’re able to show more restraint, and you’re more effective and happier as a teacher.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is my “why”?
- What is the one area of my life that I need to improve upon to help me better understand and work more effectively with Black and Latino males?
- What can I do to build stronger relationships with my Black and Latino male students?
- What three words would my students use to describe me?
- How do I want my students to remember me?

Be Caring

If you don’t feel like your students are going to be great students simply because you’re their teacher, show your students that you care—that’s half the battle. There is no perfect educator out there. Everyone has flaws. Having empathy will give you what it takes to turn any student around. Are you that one caring adult whom your students need to hear from daily? Are you speaking success into your Black and Latino male students? Claim your students as your success stories, and they will never forget it or you. Treat them like they are yours, and they will follow you and believe in you.

Commit fully. Becoming “that” caring adult comes with a responsibility. You must be fully committed, even on your

bad days. Some days you won't feel like coming to work, but you have to do it anyway. Many of us have our own kids and our own issues, but our students still deserve the best we can give them. Even when Black and Latino male students get on your last nerve, you must speak positive words into their spirits and teach them with care.

Don't feel sorry for them. Caring means having empathy for your students without feeling sorry for them. When you feel sorry for students, your expectations of them are lowered. Students need your expectations to remain high. Don't show favoritism. All students deserve to have you believe in them.

Be Open

Students will open up to you when you share who you really are. Although males can sometimes be stubborn and may not trust people enough to share their most inner thoughts and hurts, if you are open with them as you work to build relationships and rapport with them, they will open up—eventually. Do you have personal stories you'd be willing to share with students if you knew they could make a difference in their lives? It takes bravery to open up, but it can make all the difference.

Know and Work On Your Shortcomings

The first step to personal growth is honesty. We must be honest with ourselves about what we need to improve upon.

Take a moment and list areas in your teaching life where you think you can improve. (Take this exercise, which will require you to let your guard down and be completely honest with yourself, because your shortcomings could be holding you back from doing your job more efficiently.) Then write down how you plan to address the most pressing of your weaknesses. If you don't know how to overcome one or more of your shortcomings, seek further assistance and advice from your supervisor or counseling services in your area.

Believe in Every Student

Every student can be a success story. Whether male, female, Black, Latino, white, Mexican, Native American, Middle Eastern, Asian, Indian, or what have you, every student has the potential to be great, and every student deserves a champion.

Students don't always know their full potential. It's up to us as educators to convince them that they can change their narrative. Many students come to school broken and lacking direction. Some have no idea that all they have to do is focus—block out the noise and negativity in their lives and

focus on what they can control—and they can succeed at anything. Controlling responses to others is part core beliefs and mindsets of a culturally responsive educator. People can do or say whatever they want to a person, but how a person responds is up to them.

Building Strong Relationships with Your Students and Staff

Relationship-building is key to improving how educators relate to and reach students—especially Black and Latino male students. The lack of positive interaction among teachers, administrators, parents, and students is one of the reasons we lose too many of our students. You cannot teach those you can't reach. Whether you have been doing this work for one year or 31 years, the fact is that students respond better to and respect those who build relationships with them. It's tough for students to communicate with someone they don't have a good relationship with. The educator who builds strong relationships with students will be the most successful. Strong, healthy relationships share the following characteristics:

- Mutual respect
- Trust
- Honesty
- Cooperation
- Allowance for individuality
- Good communication
- Anger control
- Fair disagreements
- Problem solving
- Celebration of self-confidence
- Modeling

Trust

Trust your students and give them the benefit of the doubt. Trust will require that you be honest with your students as well as with yourself. You must work through the points of view of your students who are often hurt and easily offended and find a middle ground where you and your students can function comfortably. Don't expect students to conform in ways that limit their creativity and ability to express themselves positively. Give students room to be individuals.

Communicate with students, including working through misunderstandings, as you would have them communicate with you. Allow students to work through their feelings about something that is unsettling—and allow yourself to do the same—even if it means a few extra minutes of discussion after school or after class. Even when you feel like the young man is not listening, love out of him what’s inside. Look past the stubborn behavior. Students will eventually respond in a positive way to someone they feel they can trust.

Respect

Most people have different scales by which to weigh respect ... and disrespect. What is your definition of respect? What is your definition of disrespect? How do you gauge what’s respectful versus what is disrespectful with your students and staff? Most school districts don’t have any guidelines by which to determine discipline techniques. Educators determine what is respectful or disrespectful based on their own definitions, perceptions, and biases.

We are supposed to set the example of what leadership looks like. We can’t do that when we lead with our emotions.

Get to Know and Stay Informed About Students

Each of your Black and Latino male students will be different in the way they receive and process information. They will bring into your classroom a wide variety of home-life experiences that will influence the way they present themselves on a daily basis. Get to know the different economic statuses of students so that you can understand them. The more you understand each student’s needs, shortcomings, strengths, and motivating factors, the easier it will be to get them involved in the learning process.

Ask Probing Questions

One way to better inform yourself about your students is to ask probing questions. Early in the school year, have students building strong relationships with your students and staff. Form a circle, introduce yourself to the class, and then have students introduce themselves and share one thing that they like to do. (Administrators, do the same in a staff meeting or in a professional development workshop with staff.) Ask about their favorite subjects in school, extracurricular activities, and siblings, and find out whether they are the oldest, youngest, or middle children and what they plan to do during school breaks. Customize the list of questions for your students.

Listen to Students

The six essential rules of good listening are

- Be silent when others are speaking.
- Ask good questions to get the conversation going.
- Think before responding.
- Avoid outside distractions (phone, television, laptop, etc.).
- Show you are interested through your positive body language.
- Control the tone of your voice.

Give Black and Latino Male Students Leadership Roles

The only way to teach leadership is to model it and practice it with your students. Just because a student has high self-esteem doesn’t mean he is a good leader. Just because a student doesn’t say much doesn’t mean he can’t become an effective leader. Leadership requires trust, loyalty, consistency, perseverance, compassion, and resolve. Benefits include confidence, growth, better productivity, and fewer distractions and behavior issues. If you build trust, you will receive better buy-in from your students.

Following is a list of leadership roles to consider for your Black and Latino male students:

- Taking attendance
- Passing out papers, tests, and so on
- Running errands
- Tutoring students in need
- Mentoring other students
- Making copies
- Making announcements
- Passing out snacks
- Making phone calls
- Answering the phone
- (Administrators), crafting e-mails to send out to the student body

Tell the Truth

Be transparent about your hurts and disappointments. Tell the truth about wanting to quit at times but not giving up.

Tell the truth about having grown up socially and economically disadvantaged but refusing to use those things as excuses. Tell the truth about your upbringing, whether it was ideal or troubled. Tell the truth about trauma—including abuse, neglect, or abandonment—because someone may benefit from your story. Be transparent about the consequences of bad relationships that you have been in and learned from. Talk about the consequences of choosing the wrong friends. Let students know that if they show you their friends, you will show them their future.

Be the educator you were called to be. Be the educator you wanted and needed as a student. Make every effort to find fulfillment in this calling for yourself as well as for your Black and Latino male students. Be the educator they need.

Conclusion

If you haven't experienced students coming back to see you or reaching out to you via social media, put the time, effort, and patience into the task of thoughtfully educating all your students and just wait. You will feel joy and excitement when you see the fruits of your labor in the form of former students grown up with families and flourishing in the roles as fathers, husbands, and productive citizens. It's sometimes breathtaking. It is in those moments that it all comes full circle, and you will see with your own eyes that your efforts toward those distant and seemingly unreachable young men were well worth your time.

So, when you walk into your classroom or building and are faced with Black and Latino male students, you have an opportunity to put all that you have learned to work. What choices will you make? When your students come back in five, 10, or 15 years, what will they say to you? What impact will you have had on them?



Robert Jackson began his teaching career with a no-nonsense but caring approach to education in Indianapolis public schools more than 20 years ago—after being cut from the NFL (Minnesota Vikings). He created a No More Excuses curriculum, which has been featured in publications nationally and is being used in K–12 schools, colleges, and universities.

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