

The Sims Framework: Reimagining Mentoring and Pedagogy to Improve Academic Outcomes for Black Boys

Sims, D.

Sims-Fayola Foundation

This presentation introduces the Sims Framework of Academic Achievement for Boys of Color (SFAABC), a mentoring-informed pedagogical model grounded in Afrocentric theory. Developed through a mixed-methods study, the framework explores how culturally relevant mentoring can be embedded into classroom instruction to address systemic barriers impacting Black boys in education. The session will be interactive, blending data insights with practical strategies for educators. The Sims Framework integrates Afrocentric mentoring with culturally responsive teaching, offering a structure for supporting identity, agency, and academic success. It draws from concepts of social identity, self-efficacy, and asset-based achievement models for boys of color. The study took place in a school setting where Black male students were consistently underperforming on standardized assessments. Teachers engaged in professional development focused on Afrocentric mentoring and applied the framework in their classrooms. While academic outcomes varied, students whose teachers held beliefs aligned with the framework were more likely to reach grade-level proficiency. Additionally, teachers reported a stronger grasp of Afrocentric mentoring and how to apply it in instruction. These early results point to the potential of the Sims Framework to enhance educational outcomes for boys of color and emphasize the need for further research and sustained implementation.

Keywords: Boys of Color, Afrocentric theory, mixed-methods, culturally responsive teaching, Sims framework

Introduction

Black boys in American schools continue to face deeply rooted systemic barriers that limit their academic success. These include biased disciplinary practices, exclusion from rigorous curriculum, lack of affirming role models, and the prevalence of Eurocentric instructional models (Berry, 2008; Gilliam et al., 2016). These systemic issues are not just incidental; they are built into the structure of schooling in ways that deny many Black boys the opportunity to realize their full academic potential. The Sims Framework of Academic Achievement for Boys of Color (SFAABC) was developed in response to this longstanding educational inequity. This innovative framework integrates Afrocentric mentoring and culturally responsive pedagogy into classroom instruction, reimagining how teachers can affirm, support, and challenge Black boys to succeed academically. It moves beyond performative approaches to equity and engages deeply with the lived experiences and cultural identities of boys of color, providing both a philosophical and practical guide for transforming instruction.

Literature Review

The Sims Framework draws from a variety of foundational theories and research traditions. Afrocentric mentoring is rooted in African-centered philosophies that emphasize communalism, cultural pride, and self-determination (Asante, 1991). Afrocentric mentoring contrasts sharply with the dominant Eurocentric models of education, which often marginalize the cultural values and experiences of Black students. Culturally relevant pedagogy, as outlined by Gay (2010), also serves as a key pillar. This pedagogy calls for using students' cultural knowledge, experiences, and performance styles to make learning more appropriate and effective. In addition, the framework is informed by theories of social identity and self-efficacy, which posit that a student's belief in their ability to succeed is closely tied to how they see themselves in relation to the content, teacher, and institution. Research has shown that Black boys often experience school as sites of alienation, where their identities are ignored or vilified (Martin et al., 2010; Dickerson & Agosto, 2015). The Sims Framework seeks to invert this

dynamic by centering their cultural identities and affirming their place in the academic community. It also incorporates anti-deficit achievement frameworks that reject the idea of Black boys as broken and instead focus on their assets and potential.

Methodology

The study employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods design to develop and evaluate the Sims Framework. In the first phase, qualitative data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with ten teachers from a K-8 public charter school in a predominantly African American urban community. These teachers worked primarily with Black male students and represented diverse subject areas, including language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. All had at least three years of teaching experience, and 60% identified as teachers of color. These interviews explored participants' understanding of mentoring, experiences with Afrocentric practices, and current classroom approaches. The qualitative findings helped shape the professional development series, which served as the intervention for the study.

Teachers participated in workshops focused on Afrocentric mentoring principles, culturally responsive instruction, and practical strategies for integrating these concepts into daily practice. Classroom observations were conducted over three months to document shifts in pedagogical practices and mentoring behaviors. A specialized rubric, developed from the literature and conceptual framework, was used to assess fidelity to the Sims Framework.

In the second phase, quantitative data were gathered using STAR Reading and Math assessments to measure proficiency and growth. These assessments were administered pre- and post-intervention to track academic progress. The school in which the study was conducted served a student population that was 90% Black, 7% Latinx, and 3% other racial/ethnic groups, with over 80% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The study examined the correlation between teacher implementation of the Sims Framework and academic performance among Black male students in this high-need setting.

Findings

The study's data revealed both promising outcomes and areas for further exploration. On the academic front, students in classrooms where teachers applied the Sims Framework with fidelity demonstrated greater growth in reading and math. This was particularly evident among students who had been performing below grade level at the start of the study. STAR assessment data showed that more of these students reached grade-level proficiency by the end of the intervention compared to those in control

classrooms.

Qualitative findings highlighted a transformation in teacher mindsets. Teachers reported a greater awareness of their own biases, a deeper understanding of the cultural needs of Black boys, and a stronger commitment to mentoring as a pedagogical practice. They described changes in how they engaged students, approached lesson planning, and built classroom community. Teachers noted that students were more engaged, confident, and likely to participate in academic tasks when they felt seen and affirmed.

However, the findings also underscored challenges. Some teachers struggled to fully integrate the framework due to competing priorities, limited time, or lack of institutional support. Additionally, the short duration of the intervention limited the ability to measure long-term impact. These limitations suggest that while the Sims Framework holds potential, sustained implementation and institutional commitment are necessary for lasting change.

Discussion

The findings of this study affirm the central argument of the Sims Framework: that effective teaching of Black boys must involve both high expectations and cultural responsiveness, grounded in a mentoring mindset. This research contributes to the growing body of work that argues for integrating identity-affirming practices in pedagogy. While promising, the study also reveals the complexity of changing entrenched beliefs and systems. Teachers cannot be expected to carry the full burden of transformation without systemic support from school leaders, districts, and policymakers. Leadership is critical in embedding the Sims Framework into school culture. Principals and instructional leaders must provide space, time, and resources for professional development that goes beyond surface-level equity training. Schools must also revisit curriculum choices, discipline policies, and student support structures to ensure alignment with the framework's values.

The data suggest that alignment between teacher beliefs and the framework's principles is key. For instance, teachers who embraced a developmental approach and focused on supporting identity and agency in Black boys were more effective in promoting academic growth. Additionally, qualitative findings revealed that when teachers understood mentoring not as an add-on, but as part of their instructional practice, students were more likely to engage and experience success.

The Sims Framework also encourages a rethinking of what success looks like for Black boys. Academic achievement, while critical, must be understood in tandem with measures of identity development, self-confidence, and connection to school. A broader, more holistic

definition of success better aligns with the Afrocentric values of the framework. The term “anti-deficit framework” is an approach that rejects narratives that focus solely on marginalized students’ perceived shortcomings or failures. Instead, it emphasizes their strengths, potential, cultural wealth, and resilience, positioning them as capable learners whose success is hindered not by ability but by systemic inequities.

Scaling the Sims Framework requires vertical and horizontal integration within schools and districts. Vertically, school leaders should embed the framework into strategic planning, curriculum development, and professional growth structures. Horizontally, districts should replicate the model across schools with similar demographics, ensuring localized adaptations that preserve the core Afrocentric principles. Long-term evaluation should include longitudinal tracking of student outcomes (academic, behavioral, and socio-emotional) and changes in teacher beliefs and instructional practices. External assessment, participatory research with community stakeholders, and policy audits can all support accountability and continuous improvement.

This research highlights the importance of equity-centered leadership and policy reform in sustaining the Sims Framework. Equity-centered leaders prioritize systemic transformation over isolated interventions. They advocate for policies that support culturally responsive curricula, reallocate resources to under-resourced schools, and ensure accountability systems recognize holistic measures of student success. Policy advocacy should include removing barriers to culturally grounded professional development, supporting affinity-based mentorship models, and protecting school-level innovation from restrictive mandates. When district and state leaders operate with an explicit commitment to racial equity, initiatives like the Sims Framework can move from promising practices to transformative systems change.

Implications for Practice

Educators who wish to implement the Sims Framework should begin by cultivating a mentoring mindset. This involves seeing students not only as learners but as whole people with cultural identities, histories, and aspirations. Mentoring in this context does not require additional programming; rather, it becomes a way of teaching. Teachers should consider how their daily interactions, classroom rituals, and instructional decisions can either affirm or marginalize students.

The study’s implications suggest that educators must take a developmental approach when working with Black boys. This includes prioritizing their social-emotional development, promoting positive racial identity, and intentionally using cultural frames of reference in instruction. Moreover, fostering a sense of purpose in learning was a powerful motivator,

encouraging students to connect their education to future aspirations and community uplift.

Professional Development

Professional development is another key area. Schools should invest in ongoing, job-embedded training that equips educators with the skills and dispositions to mentor as they teach. This includes training in Afrocentric principles, culturally responsive lesson design, and strategies for affirming racial identity through content. Teachers also need time to reflect, collaborate, and receive feedback in a supportive environment to sustain these practices.

At the systems level, school districts must embed frameworks like SFAABC into their strategic plans. This means aligning hiring practices, evaluation tools, and school improvement goals with the values of equity and cultural responsiveness. Community partnerships can also play a role, especially those that bring in mentors and role models who reflect the identities of the students.

Districts should also consider investing in national experts and culturally responsive curricular resources that reflect the contributions and experiences of African American communities. By fostering partnerships and allocating funds for Afrocentric and mentoring-based programs, districts can provide the infrastructure necessary for long-term implementation and evaluation.

Finally, building coalitions with families, community organizations, and youth will enhance the Sims Framework’s authenticity and reach. Equity becomes more attainable when all stakeholders are engaged, and Black boys see themselves reflected in every aspect of their educational environment.

Conclusion

The Sims Framework offers a compelling model for reimagining education for boys of color. Integrating Afrocentric mentoring and culturally responsive pedagogy addresses the dual challenges of academic underachievement and cultural alienation. Although this study was limited in scope and duration, the initial findings strongly justify broader implementation and further research.

As schools grapple with how to meet the needs of diverse learners, the Sims Framework stands out for its holistic, culturally grounded approach. It offers strategies and a vision, one in which Black boys are not seen as problems to be fixed but as scholars to be supported, affirmed, and inspired. Ultimately, educational equity requires more than good intentions. It demands intentional models, informed by research and rooted in the lived experiences of those most impacted. The Sims Framework is one such model, designed not to fix Black boys, but to fix the systems that fail them.

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