

From Mentorship to Leadership: A Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educators

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Making the decision to enter the demanding field of education can be complicated for many. For Black males, there are the additional considerations of fit, development, and opportunity for the future when determining whether going into the education field will be beneficial to their professional goals. Due to minimal representation of Black males in teaching and educational leadership positions, Black males must imagine themselves thriving in the education space. As they navigate through systemic and racial disparities during the recruitment, retention, and promotion phases of their journey, Black males need to make connections and seek guidance from experienced Black male educators to support them in their journey. Turning lemons into lemonade, or mentorship into leadership, the practices of Black male educational leaders as they curate intentional mentorship relationships with Black male educators, have been applied to development of a Mentorship Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educators. This body of work highlights the evolving practices for mentorship, guided by an equity-based framework designed to support Black males in navigating the difficult and challenging educational landscape, that will ultimately increase representation of Black males in classroom teacher and educational leadership positions.

Keywords: mentorship, leadership, Black male educators, equity-based framework

Introduction

Impact is a word that is used in the education field to describe the way leaders lead, the way teachers teach, the goal for students, and much more. Impact in education is defined as the effect that practices, initiatives, and leadership have on the trajectories of both students and professionals within the landscape. Entering the education field, many have a goal of being impactful to students, whether it is directly through classroom instruction or at the higher level as a leader. In order to be impactful, an educator must possess many personal and professional qualities. These qualities include content knowledge, communication, patience, time management, adaptability, conflict resolution, critical thinking, and teamwork. Many of the qualities listed (and those not listed) can be nurtured through intentional connections made between a mentor and a mentee. This is the rationale behind the practice of connecting beginner teachers with mentor teachers or coaches to nurture those qualities in the beginner teacher.

With mentorship, the process takes intention even further in connecting two or more individuals where one is positioned where the other aspires to go. Typically, these relationships are formed organically when either the mentor or mentee seeks out support from someone in which they see a similar journey. Because Black men are underrepresented in education, connecting two Black male educators for a mentorship relationship is more difficult. It is also less formal because the tools and programs do not yet exist in the landscape. Any tool that is created specifically to support the

mentorship of Black male educators must take into account the underrepresentation in the field; the systematic disparities that exist which create race-based stress along; and the leadership models that will need to be implemented to effectively support the recruitment, retention, and promotion of Black men in the field of education. This article employs the tenets of transformational and servant leadership to introduce an equity-focused mentorship framework for supporting Black male educators on their journey to leadership.

Literature Review

This literature review starts off by exploring the leadership theories utilized in developing the framework for supporting Black male educators on their journey to leadership. After diving into the servant and transformational leadership theories, there is an exploration of research around the experiences of Black male educators. Then, mentorship is defined leading to the review of current mentorship frameworks in the landscape. The literature review concludes by highlighting leadership coaching models and taking a deeper dive into the components of coaching that ultimately supported the development of the resulting framework.

Leadership Framework: Servant Leadership & Transformational Leadership

Research on intersectionality, which is a theoretical framework rooted in the premise that the human experience is shaped by the

intersection of social positions (i.e. race and gender). According to Crenshaw (1991), “the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism” and analysis of Black people should take into account this experience when addressing issues in leadership (p. 140). Baur and colleagues (2021) highlighted that the experience of Black men cannot be understood by looking at race and gender separately. It is always important to note, when researching the effects of any phenomenon on Black males, that the intersection of being Black and being a male impacts the experience. With this, Black males in leadership positions (and those seeking leadership positions) have to face the intersectionality of both servant-based leadership and transformational leadership. Servant-based leadership plays into race. Black professionals oftentimes adapt to servant-based leadership models naturally due to their innate responsibility to put the needs of others over their own. In desiring to impact the landscape and thrive in leadership positions, in our patriarchal society, Black male professionals oftentimes adopt a transformational leadership style, which can be attributed to the gendered aspect of their identity.

Servant leadership has been successfully practiced by Black male leaders throughout history. Most notably, Dr. Martin Luther King practiced servant leadership as he led the civil rights movement. According to Sparkman and Morris (2021), “servant leadership uniquely challenges leaders to prioritize the development of others above all else, advocate on their behalf, and improve outcomes for all stakeholders” (p. 360). The idea of Black males advocating on behalf of their community and prioritizing the development of others above all else can be found in the practices of religious leaders, community advocates, and even Black fraternities (Sparkman & Morris, 2021). Servant leadership is regarded as an effective leadership practice amongst Black males as “there is much evidence that servant leadership yields many positive follower and leader outcomes” (Sparkman & Morris, 2021, p. 361). For Black males, servant leadership practices lead to trust, effectiveness, integrity, and the positive development of mentorship relationships.

The implementation of servant leadership intersects with the practice of transformational leadership amongst Black males in education. Research has shown that leaders often employ a transformational leadership model in order to achieve high impact. Transformational leadership is defined as “a leadership approach in which a leader transforms his followers, inspires them, builds trust, encourages them, admires their innovative ideas, and develops them” (Khan et al., 2020, p. 2). Transformational leadership, as a model, is the most extensively acknowledged model in leadership literature (Khan et al., 2020). Through transformational leadership practices, behaviors of those being led are transformed into an improvement of self-confidence which leads to the achievement of intended outcomes, or

impact. As such the transformational leadership model has been used to develop the *Mentorship Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educators*.

Identifying Black Male Educators

Significant consequences of institutional racism and the lack of representation of Black males in education are the noticeable absence of Black males in both teaching and educational leadership positions (Jeter & Melendez, 2022). Researchers have highlighted the increasing demand for Black male educators which requires building and implementation of tools and initiatives to promote, recruit, and retain Black males in the educational landscape (Underwood et al., 2019). When thinking about the potential impact of the underrepresentation of Black males in education, the Black male student comes to mind. Because Black males are noticeably absent from the landscape, also lacking are the servant and transformational leadership practices which may potentially influence more Black male students to pursue their aspirations, reach success, and close the education and wealth gaps that have plagued Black families throughout history (Jones, 2019).

If the potential impact for students lies in Black male educators being represented throughout the education sector, why are there not more Black males pursuing and retaining positions in education? According to Bose (2022), issues such as self-perception of qualifications in the role and perceptions of role performance, decreased numbers of Black male students pursuing post-secondary opportunities, and lack of trust in the education system amongst Black families are cited as reasons for this underrepresentation. The systemic issues that exist in the landscape and in society in general, coupled with any one of these issues listed above may deter Black males from pursuing careers in education. Specifically, the conflict of either not seeing Black men in school leadership positions or seeing Black men in majority discipline and consequence related positions; may influence the decision of Black males to enter the education field upon graduation.

Teacher Residency Programs

Mentorship in this context is defined as an intervention or action taken to improve a situation and is regarded as an essential component of teacher preparation programs (Afacan, 2021). For educators, mentorship is one practice that can be utilized to support their development as professionals. For Black male educators, mentorship is a practice that may support them in their innate position as servant leaders, working every day to transform the landscape, ultimately the lives of others. One example of a mentorship model in education is the Teacher Residency Program. Many alternative certification and beginner teacher development programs employ

this model. Similar to a medical residency, teachers participating in a teaching residency receive mentorship from an experienced teacher through an apprenticeship structure and preparation of candidates in cohorts (Afacan, 2021). These programs typically involve a personality or working style quiz or process to connect teachers with their mentor. While participating in these programs, “teacher candidates receive weekly guidance from an experienced mentor teacher, work with an induction coach, have regular meetings with their cohorts for professional development, and are supported by administrators for choosing right teaching environments in teacher residency programs” (Afacan, 2021, p. 353). These programs typically involve a personality or working style quiz or process to connect teachers with their mentor.

Common characteristics of teacher residency programs include being time bound; combining theory and practice; providing intensive mentorship support; offering courses, workshops, and group meetings; offering stipends for financial support; and providing ongoing support post-graduation (Afacan, 2021). Many of these programs lasted at least one year, but no more than two years. At the end of the program, although the mentor and mentee could choose to continue a networking relationship, it is not required. Although the networking relationship has proven to be essential to the success of mentoring for both the mentor and mentee, many of these programs do not regard relationship-building to be as important as implementing theory and practice. The ongoing support offered post program completion varied in programs. The measures of success used in program evaluation includes retention measures, participant ratings, participant retention, and the achievement of employment post-completion (Afacan, 2021). The success of the individuals in the program is usually measured by their professional journey and achievement of individual professional aspirations, upon program completion.

Equity-focused Leadership Coaching

Beyond increasing the number of Black male educators in classroom and leadership positions, a mentoring framework specifically designed for Black male educators needs to focus on promoting equity for Black males and working towards closing the wealth and achievement gap. In order to develop an equity-focused mentoring framework, it was important to look into coaching. There is a significant amount of research which explores coaching with the intention of promoting equity. An equity-focused coaching framework uniquely creates a space to consider how an individual's identity and positionality may unconsciously lead to unexamined bias and possibly influence a coaching conversation (Orange et al., 2019). Characteristics of equity-focused coaching include the following: relational trust, identity, reciprocity, and equity stance. All these characteristics are essential in the development of a framework because

they lead to impact. Equity-focused coaching practices that supported the development of the mentorship framework include the following: promoting reciprocal dialogue, engaging in critical reflection, and implementing equity action. The remainder of this article introduces the mentoring framework and highlights the practices used in the Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male educators' leadership journey.

Methodology

To uncover the essential components of an equity-focused mentoring framework for supporting the leadership journey of Black male educators the research employed qualitative phenomenology. Eight participants, Black male educators (referred to as mentees) on varying stages of their leadership journey, assigned meaning to their experiences with a Black male educator that they identified as their mentor. The phenomenon that is being studied is “mentorship.” Through a series of interviews, mentees answered six open-ended questions regarding their mentorship experience; the researcher was able to provide a description of mentorship, reduce assumptions made about impact the mentorship experience of mentees, make connections to determine the core essence of the mentees experience, and describe the intentionality of the practices that essentially became the components of the final framework. The phenomenological method was chosen due to its focus on meaning-making and the reflection of the transformational experience of each mentee.

Findings

Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educators

There is a great demand for more Black male classroom teachers and education leaders. To meet this demand, it is important to promote a framework for Black male educators to matriculate from mentorship to leadership. In the literature review, we explored how the intersectionality of servant leadership and transformational leadership theories support a mentorship framework for Black Male educators. There was also an exploration of the characteristics of existing mentorship frameworks, with a notable focus on time-bound implementation and participation. The exploration of equity-focused coaching practices which lend to the development of an equity-focused framework, led us to the discussion of two components that are considered essential for understanding prior to uncovering the framework for mentorship. These are authentic voice and equity leadership.

Discussion

The *Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educators* is guided by five steps as define in the following information: connect,

Figure 1.1
Mentor Framework for Supporting Black Male Educators

Connect	Commit	Guide	Coach	Reflect
Implementing Authentic Voice and Equity Leadership to identify and connect with potential mentor/mentee and establish initial relationship	Setting intentions and co-creating norms to begin mentoring relationship	Nurturing the Mentoring Relationship by engaging in reciprocal dialogue	Implementing Solution-Based Mentoring Practices to implement equity action	Engage in cycles of critical reflection to iterate and enhance the ongoing mentorship relationship

commit, guide, coach, and reflect.

Step 1: Connect

Practicing Authentic Voice to Make a Connection

Unlike teacher residency programs, an effective mentorship framework for Black males in education will not be time bound. In fact, an effective mentorship framework for Black males in education will be implemented long-term with a focus on relationship building. As such, the first and most essential step of the mentorship framework for Black males in education is to identify the mentor/mentee and forge a relationship. There are no personality quizzes or match-making formulas involved in this process. For the mentee, it is simply guided by intentionally seeking out or networking with someone who has achieved a level of success that you want to achieve. For the mentor, it is offering support to someone that has demonstrated the potential to achieve the level of success that they aspire to. While there are less options in the landscape for Black men due to underrepresentation, connecting to Black male educators in the small community available can be done organically, making relationship building more realistic.

A relationship-focused solution will benefit Black males as they navigate the demands of being transformational educators and servant leaders. Both the concepts of authentic voice and equity leadership are essential to the relationship-focused solution. To understand the framework, we must first look at the process of developing an authentic voice and practicing equity leadership. According to Henry (2015):

A strong, authentic, compelling voice is the expression of identity, guided by vision, and achieved through mastery. These three work together as a part of the lifelong process of growth and discovery. Developing their authentic voice is the result of lifelong layers of learning, experimentation, and failure.

After identifying and creating a process for relationship building, a focus on finding their essential voice is a necessary step for the mentor

and mentee to take before diving into the mentorship process. Below are some questions for both mentors and mentees to consider as they begin developing their authentic voice:

1. Who are you?
2. What is your identity?
3. What is your vision for impact?
4. What have you achieved and how have you mastered skills to lead to their achievements?

Knowing the answers to these questions supports the mentor and mentee in making the case for a mentorship relationship. Being able to express their perception of their identity helps in making connections. Sharing their vision for impact helps in determining if there is alignment between the journey of the mentor and the aspirations of the mentee. For example, if the mentee has ambitions to become Superintendent of schools and the mentor has achieved that goal in their own journey; then this would justify the development of a mentorship relationship. Finally, being able to reflect and share details about experiences and skills that led to achievements supports the coaching conversations that will transpire during the mentorship relationship. Once the mentor/mentee has answered these questions, then they can use the answers to formulate their authentic voice and start the process of relationship building.

Implementing Equity Leadership Practices

Equity leadership is defined as a style of leadership that aims to create an inclusive and fair environment where everyone has equal opportunities to learn and perform. The rationale behind both mentors and mentees preparing to express their authentic voice is due to the mentoring relationship promoted by the framework being grounded in equity leadership. Both the mentor and mentee should have equal opportunity to learn and perform through the mentorship relationship. The mentor has to be prepared to seek feedback from others to implement in the mentorship relationship and to seek feedback from the mentee to enhance the mentorship relationship. There

has to be an intentional practice implemented to build trust and promote an equitable use of authentic voice. For the mentors, it is important to engage in practice using their authentic voice in opportunities that will lead to influencing others' perception of them. Mentors are held accountable to everything that they say, being authentic in what they share and how they share it, is a necessary factor. Being equitable in creating an inclusive and fair environment supports the mentee in gaining what they need from the mentorship relationship.

As stated earlier, the framework for Black Male Educator Mentorship is based on equity-focused coaching. The word equity is vital because mentoring a specific group of people, especially those from a marginalized group, requires the mentor to ensure that the mentee is getting what they need from the mentorship, when they need it. Adopting an equity focused lens to approach this framework for mentoring will support effective facilitation of the framework because Black Male educators are best served through an equity focused mentoring lens. There are four attributes to equity-based coaching:

1. Seeking to understand core values and beliefs
2. Reframing perspectives to create viable solutions to challenging situations
3. Building self and cultural awareness
4. Conceptualizing an authentic voice that impacts social change

The first attribute is seeking to understand core values and beliefs. At the core of self discovery, being able to effectively serve others, and getting prepared to adopt a mentoring framework is the personal understanding of core values and beliefs. In addition to that, is the willingness to seek out understanding of others. As a mentor, one of the characteristics of readiness is listening. Mentors must be able to listen to their mentees and they must also be intentional about figuring out the things that matter to their mentee. This understanding of the mentee as a whole, drives the entire mentorship process.

In adopting an equity focused mentoring lens,

mentors must reframe perspectives to create solutions. In other words, the mentor must adopt solution-focused practices to support their mentees through challenging situations. Building self and cultural awareness is also a practice that supports an equity-focused mentoring relationship. The more the mentor learns about themselves, the more they can support others. Also, as they build self-awareness, they should be mirroring those practices toward the mentee. Self-awareness is an executive functioning skill that is necessary to thrive in any professional setting. Working to enhance the self and culture awareness of the mentee supports their personal and professional development. Building this awareness also increases equity in that it allows for reflection of the needs of all involved.

Finally, equity-focused mentoring practices lead back to conceptualizing authentic voices to impact social change. As the mentor uses their authentic voice to prompt the practice within the mentee, agency is being built and this is needed to impact social change. Confidence and awareness of their authentic voice promotes agency and advocacy because when people are confident, they are more likely to speak out on the issues that they see happening around them. As a mentor, part of being equitable is being able to build up the propensity for their mentee to mirror their modeled practices.

Phases of Mentoring

Existing mentoring frameworks focus on the overall mentoring relationship and best practices for providing mentorship. Many of the frameworks are focused solely on communication within the relationship. There is a unique need for mentoring frameworks for Black males in education to focus on two phases: a pre-mentoring phase and a mentoring phase (highlighted in Figure 1.2). These two phases make up Step 1 and Step 2. of the Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educators. We will first discuss the pre-mentoring phase which involves the 'connect' step of the overall framework. We will discuss phase 2 when we dive into the 'commit' step.

The first phase is establishing relationships. Because mentorship relationships established between Black males in education are usually informal and done at the initiative of either the mentor or the mentee, it was necessary for this

Figure 1.2
Phases of Mentoring

Phase 1: Pre-Mentoring Phase	Phase 2: Mentoring Phase
Relationship Building	
• Building Self Awareness • Internalizing the commitment • Researching Best Practices	• Setting Intentions • Co-Creating Communication Norms

framework to define this phase and the practices that must happen at this phase to successfully set the tone for a mentor relationship. The steps that need to be taken in order to facilitate the relationship building process include: (1) building self awareness, (2) internalizing the commitment, and (3) researching best practices.

Building Self Awareness. This is the process of reflecting and uncovering intentions, capacity, and readiness to serve as a mentor or receive guidance as a mentee. Through this process, the mentor/mentee spends some time building self-awareness around their desire and investment to participate in mentorship. There is a focus on reviewing the following: (1) the mentor's ability to either promote the pursuit of success for someone else and the mentee's willingness to trust that someone is invested in their future; (2) their capacity to mentally and physically invest time into building a relationship; and (3) their readiness to serve or participate in the mentorship relationship based on the readiness characteristics.

Internalizing the Commitment. Before making an actual commitment to the mentoring relationship, both the mentor and mentee must examine the commitment of time, knowledge, and resources required for the relationship to be effective. The second step to establishing the relationship is internalizing the commitment and their ability to provide value to the relationship through their participation. Internalizing the commitment also involves creating a vision for what the relationship process looks like and establishing formal and informal points of contact between mentor and mentee.

Researching Best Practices. Mentors and mentees, as the third step to relationship building, should seek understanding of best practices for mentoring, communication, feedback, and building trust in order to effectively engage in the relationship building process. Whether reading research publications and books, conversing with professionals who have experience in mentorship, or listening to podcasts/videos on coaching and mentorship; building some knowledge around best practices and working toward figuring out which practice best suits their needs, is essential.

Summary to Three Phases. These three phases do not function in silos, nor are they meant to be completely linear. These phases can happen at any time. The process of establishing relationships can be very diverse, depending on the educator and the setting at which the relationship was initiated. Regardless of how the relationship is established, the act of making connections through practicing authentic voice, leading with equity, and going through the phases in the pre-mentoring phase will lead to step 2 in Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educator, which is

commitment.

Step 2: Commit

The second phase in the Mentoring Framework for Black Males in Education is an essential step because once a relationship has been established, both the mentor and mentee agree to move forward with building a mentoring relationship, a commitment is made, and phase two of mentorship is activated. This framework intentionally focuses on mentoring after a relationship is built due to the nature of how these relationships are typically formed. A Black man in a school may find himself building an organic connection with another Black man before they mutually agree on turning this relationship into a mentorship. When this is the case, this framework is a practical guide for the transition of the relationship and the continued success of the mentorship of both parties involved.

In order to establish a long-term commitment, steps must be taken within the mentoring phase to solidify the mentorship relationship. There are two practices which will be further explored to highlight how commitment happens within the Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educator. These practices are (1) setting intentions and (2) co-creating communication norms

Setting Intentions

Making a commitment means saying aloud the intentions for the relationship that will be cultivated and nurtured through mentorship. It is important for the mentor and mentee to have a conversation in which both authentic voice and equity leadership guide them to set intentions for the commitment to mentorship. Below are some example questions that should be asked in the intention setting process:

1. Why am I here? What do I wish to get out of this mentorship relationship?
2. What key values would we like to practice in this mentorship relationship?
3. How do we wish to treat each other within this mentorship relationship?
4. How will we hold each other accountable within this mentorship relationship?

Upon answering these questions, the mentor and mentee can begin co-creating communication norms, which is the second practice of the commitment step.

Co-Creating Communication Norms'

The biggest tool in a mentorship relationship is communication. This is why we focus on authentic voice, making connections, and promoting equity of leadership within this framework. It is important to establish communication norms when solidifying

the commitment to the mentorship relationship. Below are some example questions that should be asked when co-creating communication norms:

1. What are our routines? How often should we meet?
2. What mode of communication does each person in the mentorship relationship favor: text, email, phone calls, in-person?
3. When (or in what situations) should certain communication modes be utilized over the others?
4. How will we determine which content is private and which content can be shared with others?

There is value in discussing communication styles. Tools can be offered to support this discussion, but the main goal is to establish trust and promote accountability for how each person shows up in the mentorship relationship.

Step 3: Guide

Mentors, by definition, are guides/coaches who promote reciprocal practices to support the development of their mentee. After the connection is established and the commitment to the mentorship relationship is made, the coaching process can begin. This process can be much more formal than the first two steps with the use of guides, coaching conversation protocols, and agendas or it can be as informal as a conversation over coffee. The main practice in the guide step is to engage in reciprocal dialogue. During reciprocal dialogue, a two-way exchange of ideas takes place. The exchange involves the sharing of knowledge around challenges, vision, and worldview. An example of this would be the first vision setting conversation between a mentor and mentee. During this conversation, the mentee shares their vision for a period of time through short-term and long-term goals. They discuss the challenges that they may face in achieving that vision and the mentor makes connections from their personal journey to support the mentee in preparing to pursue their ambitions. The guidance practiced in these type of conversations helps to establish trust, so that when the mentor begins coaching, the mentee is well positioned to accept the advice provided through coaching.

Step 4: Coach

The difference between the 'guide' step and the coaching step is that through guidance, the mentor offers high level support in the mentee understanding, articulating, and pursuing their vision. In the 'coach' step, the mentor empowers to take action to overcome challenges through solution-based coaching. In this stage, there is

usually a problem or issue, and the mentor utilized coaching practices to support the mentee in finding the solution. This is intentional and the action starts with an inquiry about a problem the mentee has identified. The mentor then draws on experience and expertise to support the mentee in achieving the outcomes that are on the other side of that problem. This process relies on all prior stages including connection, commitment, and guidance. The commitment is especially important because the mentor must be dedicated to seeing the mentee through the challenges from beginning to end.

Step 5: Reflect

As stated earlier, this framework is meant to be implemented with longevity. It is not time bound or attached to cohorts but rather the mentor and mentees long-term commitment to learning and growing together. In step 5, both the mentor and mentee engage in cycles of critical reflection. This can be done collaboratively through conversation, or it can be individually through journaling. It is important for both the mentor and mentee to be committed to consistently reflecting on the glows and grows of their mentorship relationship.

Conclusion

The development of a Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educators is essential to increasing the number of Black male educators in the landscape. As more Black male educators benefit from mentorship and mentorship is utilized as a tool for the Black Male population, the more likely it will become for Black males to be recruited, retained, promoted, within the education landscape. The Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educators is a five-step guide for establishing, nurturing, and developing mentorship relationships between Black male mentors and Black male mentees. It is important to implement this framework which promotes the connection, commitment, guidance, coaching, and reflection of Black males who operate in the education space because through these practices, impactful professionals are developed and elevated in a sector where they are underrepresented. As the Framework for Supporting the Journey of Black Male Educators continues to be developed, resources such as conversation guides, coaching protocols, and reflection journals will continue to impact the outcomes for Black male educators on their leadership journeys.

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