

Kansas State University Libraries

New Prairie Press

Adult Education Research Conference

2016 Conference Proceedings (Charlotte, NC)

Color-conscious paradigms of adult and educational leadership development through culturally relevant mentoring: Africentricity, and critical spirituality explored.

Phillip A. Smith

Teachers College at Columbia University, pas2185@tc.columbia.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc>



Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Administration Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Urban Education Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](#)

Recommended Citation

Smith, Phillip A. (2016). "Color-conscious paradigms of adult and educational leadership development through culturally relevant mentoring: Africentricity, and critical spirituality explored.," *Adult Education Research Conference*. <https://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2016/papers/38>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Adult Education Research Conference by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Color-Conscious Paradigms of Educational Leadership Development Through Culturally Relevant Mentoring: Africentricity, and Critical Spirituality Explored

Phillip A. Smith

Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, USA

Abstract: This conceptual paper draws on the indigenous wisdoms of the African Diaspora, and critical spirituality. It strives to formulate a new definition of culturally relevant mentoring for educational leadership development as applicable to the leadership development of Black school principals and other senior educational leaders.

Keywords: culturally relevant mentoring, Africentric adult learning, critical spirituality, educational leadership development

The connection between mentoring and self-efficacy for Black principals is also connected with spiritual belonging.
Echols, 2006, p.5

The term and construct “mentor” is now commonplace, arguably overused within everyday lexicon, with common expressions and enactments of the term largely remaining the same as that described in Homer’s *Odyssey* (Fagles & Knox, 1996). The Greek origins of the term and notion of “mentor” raises important questions, as to the relevance and applicability of a dominant, Western, Eurocentric construct, absent of other cultural histories, to support the leadership development of senior leaders of African heritage [located across the African Diaspora]. Any exploration of mentoring as a phenomenon is both informed, and constrained by the determinants and attributes used to define the term itself. As we are reminded by Sharon Merriam (1983) that “*how mentoring is defined determines the extent of mentoring found*” (p.165). This is particularly relevant when exploring mentoring as part of color-conscious paradigms of adult education (Closson, 2010) and educational leadership development (Gooden 2012).

This paper seeks to ignite rethinking on adult learning and educational leadership development by offering a race critical perspective of the mentoring phenomenon, and its use as part of the leadership development of Black school principals and senior leaders. Through an integrative review of literature, that synthesizes previous relevant literature, empirical studies, documented biographies, and research, this paper strives to formulate a new and comprehensive definition and typology of culturally relevant mentoring as applicable to the adult learning and educational leadership development of Black school leaders. The paper draws on the indigenous wisdoms (Ginwright, 2015) of people from the African Diaspora, and Africentric models of mentoring within the field of education. Particular and specific reference will be made to the utility of critical spirituality as part of leadership development, as typically evidenced, although not exclusively, within the Black Church (Echols, 2006). Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, a Civil-Rights activists and educator, serves as a noteworthy example of an individual whose leadership praxis and development was nurtured through the community of the Black Church (West, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

Two central and related epistemological frameworks inform the research inquiry – critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997), and historicizing of knowledge (Brown, 2011). The conceptual framework, applicable to the research inquiry, draws on connected and inter-related bodies of literature. These have been grouped into three broad domains, linked to self and identity, of: (i) *race and racial identity*; (ii) *professional identity* and; (iii) *community/social identity*. These are to be considered within the context and understanding of the indigenous wisdoms of peoples from the African Diaspora.

Race and racial identity. The context of race and racial identity within the construct of school leadership overarches the research inquiry. Socio-economic and political contexts that assume a *color-blind* or post-racial constitution and thus ignore the complexities, import, and impact of race and racial identity stand juxtaposed with any intentional and purposeful exploration of educational leadership, adult growth, and leadership development from a race/color perspective (Chávez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005; Brooks, 2012; Gooden, 2012; Thompson & Carter, 2013).

Professional identity. The social history of the *role of the school leader* and demands and complexities of the 21st century, as well as the professionalization of the role of the school leader has necessitated significant changes to the requirements and articulation of school leadership (Rousmaniere, 2013). These are complicated by the variety of contexts within which school leadership takes place – urban, suburban, rural, public – traditional or charter, independent or private sector. *Mentoring* has long been seen as an established approach to supporting the professional and leadership development of individuals (Daloz, 2012; Ghosh, 2012). However, as Tillman (2005) highlights, the normalization, and conceptualization of the terms mentor, protégé, and mentoring relationship through a race-neutral, de-facto Eurocentric, paradigm are problematic. This necessitates the need for both a rethinking and reframing of current expressions of the term mentoring in supporting the adult learning [growth] and leadership development of Black principals and senior school leaders. A critical exploration of the mentoring phenomenon from the perspectives of cross-cultural mentoring relationships within the field of education (Johnson-Bailey & Cerevero, 2004; Barker, 2007), and Africentric mentoring models grounded in Africentric philosophy, indigenous wisdoms, and also the cultural traditions and perspectives of peoples of African heritage (Brookfield, 2003; Tillman, 2005; Echols, 2006) provides a helpful foundation towards a nuanced definition of culturally relevant mentoring within the field of educational leadership.

Community and social identity – The Black Church and critical spirituality. There is an emerging body of scholarship exploring the nature of spiritual values and practice as an attribute of effective leadership and particularly in defining race-conscious, culturally relevant paradigms of leadership (Dantley, 2003a, 2003b, 2010; Reave, 2005; Smith, 2014; Smith, Francis & Harper, 2015). Within the context of spirituality in leadership, viewing work as a vocation, “spiritual calling” or “ministry” (Reave, 2005, p.657; Dantley, 2010, p.218) is also considered a critical aspect in the demonstration of ethical behavior, values and practices as part of leader motivation.

Africentric “Mentoring” Models

Echols (2006) highlights the often unique and distinct adaptive challenges associated with race, attitudes, organizational structure, and policies as encountered by Black principals, and requiring psychosocial support, intimate care, and empathy. According to Echols (2006) for Black principals, mentoring and mentoring support is closely connected to self-efficacy and spiritual belonging. This is very different to, and distinct from Homer's [Greek Odyssey] Eurocentric model and interpretation of the mentoring relationship. In turning specifically to adult learning, Brookfield (2003) proffers the term "African American lifeworld" (p. 158) to describe the historical and socio-political context of systemic racism, and oppression, and "cultural memory" (love, 2014, p. 293) that informs the ways in which African-American's construct and formulate paradigms of knowledge (mental frameworks), sense of reality (Echols, 2006). Africentric models of adult learning [growth] and leadership development are by their very nature communal (Harris & Smith, 1999; Tolliver, 2010; Brookfield, 2016). While [formal] structures and order exist, in contrast to the traditional upward hierarchical structure, and single directional transfer of knowledge [and power] of the normative Eurocentric approach to mentoring, leadership development grounded in Africentric traditions and philosophies, are very much founded on the collective "it takes a village to raise a child" (African proverb).

Critical Spirituality as Part of Leadership Development

The concept of spirituality is very distinct to and differs from religion in that "religion is an institutionalized space where spirituality may be nurtured and celebrated" (Dantley, 2010, p.214). This is an important distinction in understanding the notion of spirituality in leadership and as part of a color-conscious paradigm of educational leadership development. Dantley (2003a, 2003b, 2010) has written extensively on the utility of critical spirituality, a phenomenon, which in part builds on Cornel West's (1999) notions of prophetic pragmatism, to inform the leadership praxis of African American school leaders. Prior empirical research conducted by the author has also explored spirituality as part of color-conscious approaches to leadership in support of the leadership development of Black male principals and senior school leaders (Smith, 2012, 2014. Also consider Smith, Francis & Harper, 2015).

Critical spirituality is very much grounded in the concept of African American spirituality as central to the transformative leadership praxis of African American [Black] educational leaders (Smith, 1994; Dantley, 2003a, 2003b, 2010). The spiritually conscious educational leader comes to a deep understanding of self, and also of the wider social, racial, and cultural context within which educational leadership takes place, sufficient to create transformational change (Dantley, 2010). Critical spirituality ignites in educational leaders a spiritual calling or ministry that is considered a critical aspect in the demonstration of ethical behaviour, values and practices as part of leader motivation.

Significance of the Research

Mentoring informed by a developmental perspective creates an opportunity for broadening perspectives, examining assumptions, and sharing expertise and leadership. Chávez and Guido-DiBrito (1999) highlight the implications for creating supportive, learning environments for adult learning, growth and development that are not only cognizant of the racial and ethnic identity of the adult learner but also acknowledge the adult learner's "experience with and interpretation of relationships with others" (p.45). The development and utility of racialized, color-conscious approaches to leadership development by employing

developmental mentoring, viz. culturally relevant approaches to mentoring that are informed by the indigenous wisdoms of the African Diaspora, Africentric models of mentoring, and critical spirituality, and supported through positive culturally congruent learning communities enables individuals to develop and *practice* their leadership as a racialized individual.

It is envisaged that a composite of domains of adult learning, mentoring models, leadership development, and critical spirituality, informed by Africentricity and the indigenous wisdoms of the African Diaspora will form the basis of a definition of culturally relevant mentoring that is both cognizant of the racial and cultural heritage and identity of Black senior educational leaders, and the racialized context[s] within which they lead and are supported (see King, 2005. Also consider Brookfield, 2003, 2016). This represents an important contribution to the formulation of a coherent, shared definition, lexicon, and understanding of culturally relevant mentoring. Having a clearer definition of culturally relevant mentoring supports more extensive research on color-conscious approaches to leadership and leadership development. This may prove invaluable in further moving towards developing a culturally relevant (culturally aligned) approach to mentoring in support of adult learning and educational leadership development.

The research and work seeks to transcend boundaries of educational leadership research and theory, through the defining and development of culturally relevant (culturally aligned) approaches to mentoring. This may usefully inform the leadership development of Black school principals leadership as well as their praxis, that is a guided moral disposition to act truly and rightly in the exercise of leadership (Aristotle), and in so doing makes a significant contribution to the body of literature on educational leadership and adult development.

References

- Barker, M. J. (2007). Cross-cultural mentoring in institutional contexts. *Negro educational review*, 58(1/2), 85.
- Brookfield, S. (2003). Racializing criticality in adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53(3), 154-169.
- Brookfield, S. (2016). Critical Adult Education Theories in M. Milana, J. Holford, S. Webb, P. Jarvis and R. Waller (Eds.). *Handbook of Adult and Lifelong Education and Learning*. NY: Palgrave/Macmillan.
- Brooks, J. S. (2012). *Black school, White school: Racism and educational (mis) leadership*. Teachers College Press.
- Brown, A. L. (2011). Same old stories?: The Black male in social science and educational literature, 1930s to the present. *Teachers College Record*, 113(9), 2047-2079.
- Caldwell, L. D. (2000). The psychology of Black men. In L. Jones (eds) *Brothers of the Academy: Up and coming Black scholars earning our way in higher education*, Sterling, Virginia: Stylus Publishing, 131-140.
- Chávez, A. F., Guido-DiBrito, F. (1999). Racial and ethnic identity and development. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 1999(84), 39-47.
- Closson, R. B. (2010). An exploration of critical race theory. In V. Sheared, et al (eds) *The Handbook of Race and Adult Education: A Resource for Dialogue on Racism*, San Francisco: CA Jossey-Bass Publishers, 173-185.
- Daloz, L. A. (2012). *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners*. San Francisco: CA Jossey-Bass Publishers

- Dantley, M. (2003a). Critical spirituality: Enhancing transformative leadership through critical theory and African American prophetic spirituality. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice*, 6, 1-15.
- Dantley, M. E. (2003b). Principled, Pragmatic, and Purposive Leadership: Reimagining Educational Leadership through Prophetic Spirituality. *Journal of School Leadership*, 13(2), 181-98
- Dantley, M. E. (2010). Successful leadership in urban schools: Principals and critical spirituality, a new approach to reform. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 214-219.
- Echols, C. (2006). *Challenges facing black American principals: A conversation about coping*. The National Council of the Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA).
- Fagles, R., & Knox, B (1996) *The Odyssey of Homer. Translated by Robert Fagles, introduction and notes by Bernard Knox*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Ghosh, R. (2012). Mentors providing challenge and support: integrating concepts from teacher mentoring in education and organizational mentoring in business. *Human Resource Development Review*, 12(2), 144-176.
- Ginwright, S., Associate Professor, San Francisco State University (2015, April 27). *Personal communication*. IUME Luncheon meeting, Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Gooden, M. (2012). What does racism have to do with leadership? Countering the idea of color-blind leadership: a reflection on race and the growing pressures of the urban principalship. *Educational Foundations*, Winter-Spring 2012.
- Harris, F., & Smith, J. C. (1999). Centricity and the mentoring experience in academia: An Africentric mentoring paradigm. *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 23(4), 229-235
- Johnson-Bailey, J., & Cervero, R. M. (2004). Mentoring in black and white: the intricacies of cross-cultural mentoring. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 12(1), 7-21.
- King, J. E. (Ed.). (2005). *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for the new century*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate IV, W. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *The Teachers College Record*, 97(1), 47-68.
- Love, B. L. (2014). "I see Trayvon Martin": What teachers can learn from the tragic death of a young black male. *The Urban Review*, 46(2), 292-306.
- Madsen, J. A., & Mabokela, R. O. (2013). *Culturally relevant schools: Creating positive workplace relationships and preventing intergroup differences*. Routledge.
- Merriam, S. (1983). Mentors and protégés: A critical review of the literature. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 33(3), 161-173.
- Pinkett, R., & Robinson, J. (2010). *Black Faces in White Places: 10 Game-changing Strategies to Achieve Success and Find Greatness*. New York: AMACOM Div American Mgmt Assn.
- Reave, L. (2005). Spiritual values and practices related to leadership effectiveness. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(5), 655-687.
- Smith, P.A. (2012). *Succession planning in London secondary schools: implications for male African-Caribbean leaders*. MBA (Public Services) Dissertation, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK
- Smith, P.A. (2014) Motivation, networks, & spirituality: the praxis of transformational educational leadership enacted by Black school leaders. Paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration Annual Convention, November 2014, Washington, D.C.

- Smith, P.A., Francis, D.G., and Harper, A. (2015). Reframing Transformational Leadership for Education and Nation Building in the Caribbean. *Caribbean Educational Research Journal* 3(2), pp.76-89.
- Smith, T. H. (1994). *Conjuring culture: Biblical formations of Black America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tate, W.F. (1997). Critical race theory and education: history, theory, and implications. *Review of Research in Education*, 22, 195-247
- Thompson, C. E., & Carter, R. T. (2013). Race, Socialization, and Contemporary Racism Manifestations. In C. Thompson, & R. Carter. (Eds.). *Racial identity theory: Applications to individual, group, and organizational interventions*. Routledge.
- Tillman, L.C. (2002). Culturally sensitive research approaches: an African-American perspective, *Educational Researcher*, 31(9), 3-12
- Tillman, L. C. (2005). Culturally sensitive research and evaluation: advancing an agenda for Black education. In J.E. King (Ed.), *Black education: A transformative research and action agenda for a new century*, 313-321.
- Tolliver, D.E. (2010). Using an African-centered paradigm for understanding race and racism in adult education. In V. Sheared et al (eds). *The handbook of race and adult education: A resource for dialogue on racism*. Jossey-Bass, 317-328.
- West, C. (1999). *The Cornel West reader*. New York: Civitas.
- West, C. (Ed.). (2015) *The Radical King: Martin Luther King, Jr*. Boston: Beacon Press