

JUST SIX  
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH  
SUMMARY



# Daring to care: the role of culturally relevant care in mentoring Black and Latino male high school students

## Key Details

### KEY WORDS

Culturally Relevant Care; Black and Latino Males; Race; Mentorship; Over-Aged and Under-Credited

### POPULATION GROUP

Racialized Youth; Youth Workers

### STEPPING UP THEMES

Strong, Supportive Friends & Families  
Education, Training & Apprenticeships

### RESEARCH ORIGIN

USA

### SOURCE

Academic

**“Given the focus in many urban schools on routine, discipline, and back to basics, this study serves as a reminder that mutual trust, high demands, and care are huge factors in the success of young Black and Latino men” (p. 999).**

### 1. What is the research about?

This research focuses on the importance of culturally relevant care (CRC) in mentoring young Black and Latino men. CRC principles include encouraging “...a strong sense of community, rigorous demands, an integration of different cultures, and a general affirmation of one’s humanity” (p. 981). The authors look at CRC through the experiences of participants in the UMOJA Network for Young Men, a mentoring program for young men who are having a hard time completing high school. UMOJA involves regular meetings between youth and their mentor, where they build mutually trusting relationships and hold one another to high expectations for success in school. By taking this approach, the researchers try to move past the one-sided way care in school is often discussed by highlighting the caring that students do for each other and the importance of CRC principles. It also challenges the usual focus on student limitations and shortcomings, instead emphasizing empowerment of young people and recognizing their capacity for social and academic success.

### 2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place at two alternative high schools in the United States.

### 3. Who is this research about?

This research is about the 14 young men (aged 16-20) who identify as Black or Latino and were part of the UMOJA mentorship program, and their adult mentor, who also identifies as Black.

### 4. How was the research done?

Information was collected in three ways: (1) observing the 14 youth participants during UMOJA group sessions; (2) a one-on-one interview with the youth mentor; and (3) focus group interviews (discussions) with the youth participants, which took place over the span of two years at the two schools hosting the UMOJA program. All of the interviews and group discussions were transcribed, reviewed, and used to find common themes, which make up the key findings of this study. Then, the themes were shown to participants and they were encouraged to ask questions and confirm that their ideas and experiences were accurately represented.

### 5. What are the key findings?

Three key themes emerged from discussions with participants: 1) mutual trust; 2) warm demanding; and 3) humanizing and freeing.

### 1) Mutual Trust

- Many of the young men initially had a hard time trusting others, based on their previous experiences. However, the group provided space to discuss this mistrust and they slowly became more comfortable with expressing themselves.
- Having an adult mentor share his own relatable past experiences also helped build trust and encouraged participants to meet the expectations outlined for the group.
- Over time, a culture of openness developed and participants were able to bond over their struggles, share knowledge and resources, and refer to each other as brothers.

### 2) “Warm Demanding”

- This describes how the mentor was both firm and supportive in his relationships with the young men.
- Before making demands of the youth, it is essential that the mentor take time to ask about and understand the home and community situations of the young men involved. This emphasizes the importance of knowing one’s students personally in an educational setting.
- It is equally important to foster a sense of discipline, including setting boundaries and creating structure; this helps youth to feel empowered when goals are achieved. As part of this process, young men begin to take responsibility for their own success and also begin to look out for one another, to ensure their brothers also meet the group’s expectations.

### 3) Humanizing & Freeing

- Education should be about the whole person and encourage participants to see their capacities as possibilities.
- When participants became more aware of the assets and strengths within themselves and the group, it played a major role in helping them to live with purpose and achieve their goals. Participants also developed a sense of responsibility to their peer group and larger community, which encouraged them to live more consciously.

### 6. Why does it matter for youth work?

This research emphasizes the importance of CRC in education and youth mentorship within alternative school settings, and the importance of challenging the deficit perspective often taken with young Black and Latino men. This includes the importance of getting to know youth individually and moving beyond standard curriculum in favour of developing a culture based on mutual trust, warm demanding, and humanizing students. For the mentor in this study, this involved working towards an equal, brotherly relationship with participants, and sharing his own similar experiences as a way to develop trust. This study also highlights the role young men can have in empowering and supporting one another to achieve academic goals by creating a culture of mutual respect and understanding.



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