



ROBERT JACKSON

FOREWORD BY PEDRO NOGUERA

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

BECOMING THE EDUCATOR THEY NEED

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INTRODUCTION

When I was 16 years old, my best friend, Tony Binion, was murdered. I remember how he laid there while people stood around staring intently at his body (which, at the insistence of the police, remained uncovered so as not to disturb the crime scene). I remember people, including family members and close friends, screaming and crying. We were so young. Neither of us had even begun to grow facial hair. Prior to the incident, Tony was at a party from which another young man, who was being disruptive, had been thrown out. After a time, the young man returned and began randomly shooting into a crowd of people, among them Tony and a few of his friends. As people scattered, Tony was shot in the chest and died at the scene.

The next morning, the headline on the front page of the newspaper read, "Shooting Victim, Good Kid," and a photo of Tony accompanied the article. I was sick to my stomach. Tears rolled down my face. The hurt I felt that day and after was excruciating. It seemed as though the rest of the world was able to move on, but my life stopped for a moment that day. This was not how Tony's and my story was supposed to end. Tony and I were going to be roommates in college, each other's best man at our weddings, and godfathers to each other's children. We had dreams of going to the pros—Tony to the NBA and me to the NFL. Like too many other young Black and Latino males, Tony's life was cut short before it could truly begin.

When I returned to school on the Tuesday following Tony's funeral, one of my teachers said something that fueled both my anger and my will to prove her wrong. She said that I was wasting my time [by coming back to school] because kids from my community didn't succeed in life. Her comment made it clear to me that she found no fulfillment in educating me. Her perception had become her reality. She was convinced that her implicit biases about young Latino males and young men who looked like me were right. I checked out of her class mentally for the remainder of that semester because I knew she didn't want me to succeed. I knew that she was just there to, as she would often state, "pass the time and get her paycheck."

When students know you don't care if they succeed, it's tough for them to focus and push themselves. I knew my teacher had her mind made up about the Black and Latino males in my class. When she interacted with us, she was distant, and when she spoke to us, it was only to scold us or make sarcastic comments. She didn't even try to hide her true feelings. I knew her perceptions of me were wrong, but as a 16-year-old with low self-esteem who was living in poverty, socially and economically disadvantaged, and living in a stressful situation at home in a violent neighborhood, I wondered if her opinion of me was right. However, regardless of her opinion of me, I wanted to be successful.

Fortunately, I also had teachers who supported and inspired me while growing up. The one I recall most fondly is my elementary teacher—Dr. Delores Sangster.

Mrs. Sangster exemplified discipline and accountability. She set high expectations for all her students, and my classmates and I understood that she expected us to do well. When we heard her heels clicking up the hallway, we immediately began to assess our behavior and adjust it accordingly. All talking ceased, and we would find our seats and sit at attention. Mrs. Sangster wasn't the one who you wanted to upset or disappoint by breaking the rules; there were consequences for that, and my classmates and I tried to avoid them at all cost.

One of my classmates, Glenn Dillard, and I just didn't get along with each other. We fought often, and Mrs. Sangster would take us into a small room and give us each three whacks with the paddle. (Mrs. Sangster's discipline was tougher than some of the hits that I took as a football player for 20 years). After she paddled me, she would always sit me down to talk. Though, with my bottom stinging, I had to struggle to focus and remain attentive; it was worth the effort because Mrs. Sangster would tell me how great I was and how much potential I had to be greater in life. She told me I was a success story waiting to happen. She saw the value in the fact that I loved to talk and told me that one day I would be speaking in front of thousands of people. Guess what? That's exactly what I do for a living today. Mrs. Sangster "spoke me" here.

Educators must use their words wisely because words affect students both positively and negatively. When students are coming from tough circumstances, a positive word can give them hope. Some of the young men in your class are extremely broken and need a positive voice.

When I was in elementary school, I was extremely hurt on most days. My stepfather—who had been physically, verbally, and mentally abusive, would walk around our house for weeks and not say two words to me, but Mrs. Sangster both spoke to me and saw something in me. I didn't know or have a relationship with my biological father, whom I strongly resemble. Even though I at times didn't like who I was or know who I was, Mrs. Sangster called me a king—and meant it. She said it so often that one day I started to believe it. One day, a young man "called me out of my name,"* and I told him, "I don't care what you call me. Mrs. Sangster said I was a king." Her words resonated with me. She spoke positive words to me and my classmates every day; some of us received them and some of us dismissed them.

About nine years ago, I delivered a keynote address at a large educational conference. As I sat on the stage waiting to be introduced, I glanced to my left, and guess who I saw in the front row?—Mrs. Sangster! I was so excited that, after being introduced, I momentarily forgot that I was there to give a keynote address, and the first thing I said was, "Hey, there is Mrs. Sangster, my former teacher!" I explained to the audience who Mrs. Sangster was and the influence she had on my life as a student at a young age and how she was that one caring adult who I needed at that time. The audience gave her a standing ovation. Tears rolled down her cheeks. She yelled out, "I knew you could do it! I knew you could do it!" I jumped off the stage and down into the audience to give her a hug. I was thankful I didn't hurt myself (the long jump from the stage to the floor was fueled by adrenaline and excitement). As I approached her to hug her and give her a kiss on the cheek,

*Referring to someone in an insulting way.

she whispered in my ear as the crowd looked on, “You and your classmates were some bad kids!”

Mrs. Sangster’s remarked made me chuckle because she never told my classmates and I as children that we were bad; she waited until I was the man she knew I could become. She understood that, as I child, I was going through enough trauma and that fire is not put out with more fire. Other teachers referred to us every day in negative terms—at risk, bad kids, not smart, special ed students (implying that all of us had learning disabilities), not intelligent, a menace to society, not college material, hopeless, criminals, mistakes, cursed people, less than, and so on. Because of Mrs. Sangster’s positive words and the frequency with which I heard them, I felt empowered to be whatever I set my mind to be. Unlike many other teachers, Mrs. Sangster tried to uplift my classmates and me with her words—and she brought out the best in us. She found fulfillment in educating *all* her students. Her words positively affirmed me and my male classmates of color.

A few years ago, Mrs. Sangster, after spending over 45 years in education, succumbed to cancer. She left behind a legacy of giving her students the option to get it right. Outside the church where the service was held, there was line around the corner of people waiting to pay their respects, and the church was filled beyond capacity. During the service, former students shared their experiences with Mrs. Sangster, telling of how she influenced their lives and made them who they were as adults. I was asked by her family to deliver a message at the funeral, which was an honor, as she had so many students from which they could have chosen. (I found out later that Mrs. Sangster had followed me through high school and college and throughout my professional career, and that she would tell her colleagues,

“Robert Jackson was one of my babies.”) Although I had other teachers through the years, Mrs. Sangster was the one teacher who claimed me as hers—and I’ll never forget that.

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—their Mrs. Sangster—who taught them how to be better versions of themselves and was relentless about their success.

My hope is that this book will show you how to be that vital, unforgettable person for your Black and Latino male students—the most underserved, suspended, and expelled students in education. They are also the most likely to be incarcerated, drop out of school, and become victims of homicide—like my friend Tony Binion. Students will not always remember what you taught them, but they will always remember how you made them feel. When former students

contact me or come back to see me, it's always about the life lessons I taught them and how they are using them, not about the subject I taught them.

What will your students say when they come back to see you?



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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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). Wanting to make a bigger impact in education 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 in the United States and Canada.

Jackson, one of the most sought-after experts on teaching cultural diversity, restorative practices, socioemotional learning, working with students who have experienced trauma, and how to educate Black and Latino males in the country, received his Bachelor's of Science degree in industrial technology from Western Kentucky University. He has delivered numerous keynote addresses and continually holds workshops for educators, administrators, parents, and students.

The author of five books—*Black Men Stand Up*, *A Boys Guide to Manhood*, *A Young Woman's Guide to Womanhood*, *Put a Stop to Bullying*, and *Solutions to Educating Black and Latino Males*—Jackson has written articles for ASCD's *Educational Leadership*. He has spoken at the national conferences of many professional organizations, including ASCD, SDE, CAAASA, NABSE, SREB, School Discipline, and ESEA National Title One.

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Related ASCD Resources

At the time of publication, the following resources were available (ASCD stock numbers appear in parentheses):

Print Products

- Motivating Black Males to Achieve in School & In Life* by Baruti K. Kafele (#109013)
- Closing the Attitude Gap: How to Fire Up Your Students to Strive for Success* by Baruti K. Kafele (#114006)
- Keeping It Real and Relevant: Building Authentic Relations in Your Diverse Classroom* by Ignacio Lopez (#117049)
- Raising Black Students' Achievement Through Culturally Responsive Teaching* by Johnnie McKinley (#110004)
- Educating Everybody's Children: Diverse Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners, Revised and Expanded 2nd Edition* by Robert W. Cole (#107003)
- The Motivated Brain: Improving Student Attention, Engagement, and Perseverance* by Gayle Gregory & Martha Kaufeldt (#115041)
- Discipline with Dignity: How to Build Responsibility, Relationships, and Respect in Your Classroom* by Richard L. Curwin, Allen N. Mendler, and Brian D. Mendler (#118018)
- Turning High-Poverty Schools Into High-Performing Schools* by William H. Parrett and Kathleen M. Budge (#109003)
- Qualities of Effective Teachers, 3rd Edition*, by James H. Stronge (#118042)
- Meeting Students Where They Live: Motivation in Urban Schools* by Richard L. Curwin (#109110)
- Learning to Choose, Choosing to Learn: The Key to Student Motivation and Achievement* by Mike Anderson (#116015)
- How to Motivate Reluctant Learners* (Mastering the Principles of Great Teaching series) by Robyn R. Jackson (#110076)
- Teachers as Classroom Coaches: How to Motivate Students Across the Content Areas* by Andi Stix and Frank Hrbek (#106031)
- Activating the Desire to Learn* by Bob Sullo (#107009)
- Learning in the Fast Lane: 8 Ways to Put All Students on the Road to Academic Success* by Suzy Pepper Rollins (#114026)
- Minding the Achievement Gap One Classroom at a Time* by Jane E. Pollock, Sharon M. Ford, and Margaret M. Black (#112005)
- Teaching With Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It* by Eric Jensen (#109074)

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