

Chapter 14

Brothers of Black and Gold: Empowering Males in the Field of Education

Darius Montez Phelps

Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

Michael Cho

Teachers College, Columbia University, USA

ABSTRACT

With being two male educators of color who are seeking to enter academia, the authors hope that their respective stories will resonate with different communities, especially communities of color. If their stories can impact and change the life of at least one person, that is sufficient enough for them. Diving into educational leadership is not for the faint hearted, but through their trials and tribulations, both independently and as a united pair, they now know that their destiny is to be that source of strength, inspiration, and encouragement that they needed as they evolved into the men that stand before you today. With this chapter, they want to create a new world, where all educators can walk hand in hand, despite one's ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs. A new world where they can unapologetically share their stories and experiences without any concern of facing shame or judgement.

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of a pandemic, our entire lives have changed. During this storm, we were privileged to have found each other while walking through the darkest periods of our life, as men, as People of Color, as educators. We come from two very different backgrounds but have come together as one, to promote and amplify the need of Men of Color in the field of education. Despite coming from different backgrounds, together we want to stand stronger as one.

My name is Michael Cho, a Korean-American male educator who was raised in an immigrant household where education was the main priority. I am Darius Phelps, African American male educator raised in a single parent home by his mother with the same priority and outlook. Along our journeys of becoming

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3460-4.ch014

tutors, teachers, mentors, and now educational consultants, we have discovered the importance of understanding identity—ethnically, socially, and culturally. We personally believe that education is not only teaching the content. Education is about leading students to understand their identities, and that teachers can't lead students to discover who they are if the educators themselves don't understand who they are.

As male Educators of Color, we have had to face various adversities, not only through our matriculation through school, but in the teaching profession as well. In a society where systemic racism and institutional injustice continue to be rampant, People of Color have been violently attacked and killed simply because of the color of their skin. In the midst of all this division and inequality, our families sacrificed their lives to create opportunity for their future children. Though our ancestors have rich cultural backgrounds, their journeys were filled with pain, trauma, and agony. Having to survive during times of war, slavery, immigration, racism, injustice, and discrimination, our parents overcame obstacles through their sheer will and grit to create better lives and a future for their families and children. The pain and scars of our ancestors are forever etched into our skin, but instead of repeating history, we have come together to write a new one.

Our families fought and literally slaved away each day for us to have the windows of opportunity that stand before us now. We understand that as Teachers of Color, the most toxic thing we can do is to project our trauma and pain to our young students. We are living in a time where children and youth are growing up in a social media era where they face types of afflictions that we never experienced at that age. In addition to the violence all children face through their electronic devices, Children of Color encounter daily racism during a time where an illusion of true freedom is constantly preached from homes, schools, politics, and the media. We, as Teachers of Color, feel the burden and responsibility to provide safe spaces for children and youth who struggle to process their thoughts and emotions, especially for those who lack the mentorship and guidance at a young age. We can empathize with those children due to the stress and hard work our families endured in order to provide us with opportunities to flourish and thrive in the professional fields we chose to pursue. We want to use education as a medium to open doors for children and youth in the same ways our families did for us.

New Levels, New Devils

Transitioning out of the classroom was not an easy decision for either of us, but in the midst of uncertainty with the state of our country, we were driven to take that necessary leap of faith because we saw the need for male Teachers of Color to push past boundaries and disrupt systems that are unjust. We need more Men of Color leading the way in higher education positions. However, in order to fight against injustice, we first need to heal from the trauma passed down from our ancestors. We are grateful for their sacrifice and legacy, but we also understand that we have the responsibility to break any generational curses from our ethnic lineage so that we can proceed to create new cultures and environments of peace and healing. Despite the baggage that may be existent from our ancestors, we believe that it is vital for us to share the stories of those who have gone before us so that we can provide a sense of connection in spaces where many feel alone, like they walk their journeys alone.

Education taught us that there is more to teaching than academics. Education involves love, joy, healing, creativity, and most importantly a deep sense of knowing and understanding who you are. Having a solid foundation of a knowledge of self is the beginning stage of teaching and healing, this is what we have learned on our journeys together. We cannot love others if we cannot love ourselves first, and this means we need to amplify and show love in both our schools and classrooms. Therefore, we must always

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