



EDUCATION, COMMUNITY AND RACIAL-ETHNIC RELATIONS: EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES AND MALI

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Abstract

Black students, as a group, are underserved by neoliberal policies and poorly resourced urban schools and Black Americans are over-represented in privatized prisons. This article challenges cultural deficit thinking and theorizing about Black children's language and culture, which have been so pervasive in the U.S. Research discussed in this article interrupts this discourse of Black inferiority and highlights the importance of students developing a critical Black consciousness, which can contribute to their academic and cultural excellence. Emancipatory pedagogy for human freedom, which supports students' positive sense of themselves and their racial-ethnic group, is also discussed. Emancipatory teaching for critical Black consciousness and human freedom means recovering history, memory and identity, so students understand the state of Black America from a critical, historical perspective. Education for this kind of consciousness requires connecting students to their family, community history and to their ancestors. Five principles of emancipatory pedagogy are presented that can guide teacher preparation, curriculum, text development, and standards-based instruction and support positive racial-ethnic relationships. These are: conscientization, critique of ideology/critique of racism as ideology, cultural agency/resistance to oppression, dialectical epistemology and teaching through cultural arts. The example of the Songhoy Club, a pedagogical laboratory for heritage teaching for students and doctoral students and engaging parents, demonstrates how teaching Songhoy language and culture connects students with their African heritage, "from the Nile to the Niger to the Neighborhood." Teaching this heritage is very important given that northern Mali is occupied by Islamic extremists who have destroyed historic cultural artifacts in Timbuktu.

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Key words: Black Education; Emancipatory pedagogy; Critical Black consciousness; Racial-ethnic identity.

See also the translation of this article for the Portuguese language in the same issue.

EDUCAÇÃO, COMUNIDADE E RELAÇÕES ÉTNICO-RACIAS: EXPERIÊNCIAS NOS ESTADOS UNIDOS E EM MALI

Resumo

Estudantes negros, como grupo, recebem um tratamento inferior tanto pelas políticas neoliberais quanto por escolas urbanas desprovidas de recursos; nas penitenciárias privadas, americanos negros são o grupo majoritário. O presente artigo contesta o pensamento e a teorização do modelo de Déficit Cultural, sobre a linguagem e a cultura das crianças negras, que têm sido tão prevalentes nos EUA. A pesquisa discutida nesse artigo interrompe este discurso da inferioridade negra e põe em evidência a importância de os estudantes desenvolverem uma consciência negra crítica, o que pode contribuir para sua excelência cultural e acadêmica. A pedagogia emancipatória para a liberdade humana, a qual promove que os estudantes tenham um senso positivo de identidade e de seu grupo étnico-racial, também é discutida. Ensino emancipatório para consciência negra crítica e liberdade humana significa resgatar história, memória e identidade de forma que os estudantes entendam a situação da América negra de uma perspectiva crítica e histórica. Educação para esse tipo de consciência requer que se conecte os estudantes às suas famílias, à história de suas comunidades e a seus ancestrais. São apresentados cinco princípios da pedagogia emancipatória que podem guiar a preparação do professor, o desenvolvimento do currículo, do texto didático, e da instrução baseada em padrões, bem como a promoção de relações étnico-raciais positivas. Estes são: conscientização, crítica da ideologia/crítica do racismo como ideologia, agência cultural/resistência à opressão, epistemologia dialética e ensino através de artes culturais. O exemplo do Clube Songhoy, um laboratório pedagógico para ensino da herança cultural a estudantes, doutorandos e pais engajados, demonstra como o ensino do idioma e cultura songhoy conecta os estudantes com sua herança africana, “do Nilo, ao Níger, ao bairro”. O ensino desse legado é fundamental, dado que o norte do Mali está ocupado por extremistas muçulmanos que destruíram artefatos culturais históricos em Timbuktu.

Palavras-chave: Black Education, pedagogia emancipatória, consciência negra crítica, identidade étnico-racial.

Veja também a tradução deste artigo para o idioma Português nesta mesma edição.



EDUCATION, COMMUNITY AND RACIAL-ETHNIC RELATIONS: EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES AND MALI

Introduction: From Practice to Theory

This article is based on an invited lecture at the Federal University of São Carlos, which focused on my research and community praxis as well as racial-ethnic relations in the contexts of the U.S. and Mali's rich heritage. I begin with some examples of the current education context in the U.S.—particularly for Black Education—and what I teach about education for human freedom in the university and in the community. This article has been expanded to address theory and scholarship that inform my teaching, research and community practice. Positive racial-ethnic relations among diverse groups in a racially plural democratic society is a meaningful and important goal of education. However, a prerequisite for this goal is a positive sense about yourself and your racial-ethnic group. This is also a task of education for human freedom (King, 2005). This article presents some information about the research related to this area of my work. For example, a growing body of research, as compared to prevailing theory and research from a cultural deficit perspective, that is, African Americans as “cultureless” or culturally pathological, for example (Stanfield, 2011), shows that a collective sense of personhood, that is to say, an affirming racial-ethnic group identity, positively impacts Black students' academic performance. However, Black people in the U.S. continue to face the challenge of how to develop positive racial-ethnic identities as people of African ancestry.

In fact, all of us, no matter what our racial-ethnic group—researchers, graduate students, teachers, students and parents—need to be liberated from society's myths that interfere with positive racial identity formation—like the enduring suspicion that Black people are intellectually (as well as genetically, morally and culturally) inferior. Discourses of the “inferiorization” of blackness, like the discourses of the criminalization of blackness (Muhammad, 2010), have evolved from the founding and throughout the history of the nation. These discourses are elemental to the belief structure of race and racial mythologizing that has come to define American culture as far back as the earliest justifications for African enslavement (Jefferson, 1785/1999; Wiencek, 2012) that were espoused by the nation's most revered political leaders, influential intellectuals and opinion makers.

This suspicion of Black inferiority, which Wynter (1984) argues has an “alter ego” relation to the normative idea of white superiority, is an ideology that I experienced in my own education. An experience I had in an undergraduate sociology theory course at Stanford University in the late 1960s (below) underscores another purpose of this article: to show how emancipatory education for human freedom requires critical Black consciousness and the recovery of



history, memory and racial identity to “de-ideologize” knowledge. It is well to remember that racism is a form of ideologized knowledge (King, 2005). Teaching for critical Black consciousness and human freedom means recovering history, memory and identity in order to understand what has happened to Black people on the continent and in the diaspora (e.g., the Americas). Young people especially need to know and understand what has happened to their own families and to their neighborhoods. They should be able to answer questions like: Why is Africa “poor” and why is our neighborhood demonized? We also need an education that enables us to understand our experiences of domination and resistance in relation to the forms of domination other groups, like Native Americans and others have experienced and resisted.

Education for this kind of consciousness also requires the involvement and participation of the community. Connecting students to their family and community history, to their ancestors, is a task of emancipatory pedagogy for human freedom. Using examples from my own research and practice-to-theory work, this article presents an example of emancipatory pedagogy that illustrates five principles of emancipatory pedagogy that are grounded in the fundamental importance of history, memory and human agency that affirming ones racial-ethnic identity makes possible. The article is divided into four parts: 1) The Current Context of Education in the U.S.; 2) Education for Human Freedom and Principles of Emancipatory Pedagogy; 3) Recovering History, Memory and Identity; and 4) *Donborey* Pedagogy: Emancipatory Model Lessons. *Donborey* is a Songhoy word (from Mali, West Africa) that we use to describe the pedagogical practice that concerns “Identity Restoration” and reconnecting with our ancestors (Akua, 2012; King, et al., 2012).

The Current Context of Education in the U.S.

Black education is negatively affected by the current educational and economic crisis in the U.S. However, debates about how to address this crisis are shaped by cultural deficit thinking and theorizing about the language and culture of Black children and poor children that have influenced educational research, academic knowledge and teaching for decades (Dudley-Marling, 2007; Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). Here is one example of what I experienced in my own education, which has led me toward theorizing and activism that recovers history, memory and identity from ideological knowledge for curriculum transformation (King, 2006, 1995).

Discourses of Black Inferiority in the Academy

In an undergraduate sociology theory course on “achievement motivation,” the professor explained that Native American folktales provide reliable (scientific) evidence that as a group, they have lower levels of motivation to

achieve academically and socially (e.g., economically). The evidence the professor presented to support this “theory” was a quantitative analysis of motivation—a formula he had devised—to evaluate the behavior of Coyote in Native American folktales. Coyote is a “trickster,” who in some tales, creates problems for others and mischievously avoids work. This racialized deficit thinking avoids structural explanations focused on racial discrimination and oppression. To compete the class assignment I conducted my investigation using an adaptation of the professor’s quantitative formula that I devised to compare the levels of “achievement motivation” in African American folktales and European, European American folktales (Mother Goose nursery rhymes and Grimm’s fairy tales).

My quantitative analysis provided “evidence” of lower levels of achievement motivation in European American children’s nursery rhymes like “Humpty Dumpty” and “Jack and Jill” as compared to African American folk tales.³ In comparison, African American folk tales like “Brer Rabbit” also include “tricksters,” but who are clever and “highly motivated” to achieve their goals. I received a top grade on this research paper. To my great surprise, years later, when the graduate teaching assistant in this course and I were both on the faculty at another university, she recalled this assignment. She asked if I remembered that paper and she asked me if that was my own work. She said: “We always wondered, if that was indeed your own work”.

This is how discourses of Black inferiority work. My professor and the graduate student Teaching Assistant had discussed my work and they “wondered” if I had plagiarized this research project. In other words, they suspected that I was not intelligent enough to produce this kind of original thinking. How else could I have developed these ideas outside the cultural deficit theoretical framework presented in the course? They apparently did not consider the possible impact on my thinking of the Black Studies movement—the intellectual revolution that was taking place inside the university alongside revolutionary social thought that guided the Black Struggle for liberation in the broader society.

Neoliberal Policies and a Return to Deficit Thinking

Today, neoliberal policies are turning back the gains of the 1960s Black Struggle for liberation when college students like me helped to establish Black Studies in the university, as we supported community activists who were engaged in struggles for power in other arenas. Now, the Black community is struggling just to keep schools open and to keep schools public rather than privatized. Our challenge is to share a vision of real education for human freedom,

³ “Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the King’s horses and all the King’s men could not put Humpty Dumpty back together again.” (Achievement Motivation score = 0). “Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after.” (Achievement Motivation score = 0).



for power and social change—a vision that some of us can actually remember. Now, our schools are being replaced with charter schools (most of which are operated by private management companies), states and municipalities are imposing tests as the sole measure of student learning and teacher effectiveness, students behavior is being criminalized—including minor infractions of school rules—as inequitable drug enforcement policies contribute to massive incarceration of Black and Latino people in privatized prisons. This is called “the cradle-to-prison pipeline”, the “prison track” in the United States that is linked to unprecedented, wide spread closure of schools as well as drastic reductions in the number of Black and Latino teachers.

In addition to the fact that most students are taught by white teachers in big cities throughout the U.S.—New York, Chicago, and San Francisco—the number of experienced Black and Latino teachers is decreasing (Achinstein, Ogawa & Sexton, 2010). These experienced teachers are being replaced by “alternatively certified” teachers, who receive little or no professional preparation. Schools are being closed and under-resourced as Black students’ academic performance reaches lower levels than ever before. The case of New Orleans is one example. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the entire unionized teaching force was terminated (Buras, 2011). The majority of these experienced teachers were Black and middle class. The New Orleans school district is being held up as an example of how to transform urban education. All across the country students, parents and teachers are fighting back—but the consciousness of what is really happening is limited because there is a well-funded propaganda campaign to hide the reality.

Of course, there is also resistance. Black education has always been about resistance. In the 1960s resistance involved creating Black Studies; Community Control of schools; revolutionary community interventions like the Black Panthers community organizing. And students today don’t learn about this community liberation history. The Black Panthers not only defended the community against police brutality, they created free breakfast programs for poor children—something the government later copied. The Black Panthers also inspired activists from Samoa and Tonga—who were in California and they went back to New Zealand and organized the Polynesian Panthers. This example shows that Black people have power and influence that our children need to know about.

I will talk about my work with students, parents and teachers that puts into practice important research on racial identity—which I will explain next. In my work, we are using Songho language and culture of Mali to raise the consciousness of students, teachers and parents about our heritage and our identity. My colleague, Dr. Hassimi Maiga, and I call this “Donborey” pedagogy—reconnecting with our ancestors. It is really both tragic and ironic that today, Mali’s rich culture and heritage is threatened and destroyed by armed invaders who are using a narrow religious ideology to oppress the people and erase the world’s patrimony in ancient sites in Mali (e.g., Timbuktu and Gao).



The late Asa G. Hilliard (2003; Nobles, 2008), who was a foremost psychologist, historian and scholar of African people's education, sent me this email describing the conditions of Black education in 2005:

Wall street corporations are making great inroads in the public schools where our children are. These are profiteers who see the large urban budgets in the systems as a cash cow. They are linked to policy makers and friends in policy implementation agencies, and in research. . . So far, our children remain on the bottom, as the educator-led systems have now become anything but educator led, generals, prosecuting attorneys, ex-governors, bankers, accountants, who are also not from the communities being served. "Management" and "accountability" [are] in, and leadership is out. Name the urban city where the African students are thriving. Ask the contractors when they will thrive. Yes, the school had needs for improvement before. However, now the rich get richer and the poor children get prepared for failure, even prison (*personal communication*).

Murrell (1997) observed that "African-American children as a group" are still being "horribly served" in major under-resourced urban school systems. Today, after more than sixty years of integration, these conditions of Black education that Murrell recounted have deteriorated even further:

[...] African American children, particularly males, fare dramatically less well than their European-American counterparts. They are disproportionately expelled, suspended, and relegated to special programs for the emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, and mentally retarded. They have dramatically higher dropout rates, yet dramatically lower grade point averages and rates of matriculation. Half as many young African-American men go to college than a decade ago. (MURRELL, 1997, p. 23)

The United States incarcerates more of its population than any other industrialized nation (King, 2009). Moreover, women are now the fastest growing prison population and Black women and girls are disproportionately represented among them. These urgent conditions require an emancipatory pedagogy.

Education for Human Freedom and Principles of Emancipatory Pedagogy

Murrell (1997) offered this clear prescription of liberatory or emancipatory education that is needed in urban schools "to heal a people": "Education should provide that center from which children learn to contest the destruction of black urban communities, to resist the assault on cultural blackness,



and to sustain the struggle for true democracy” (p. 20).⁴ Murrell elaborates further: “Children need intellectual tools for developing critical consciousness in order to develop a robust racial identity as well as sense of self-agency and self-determination” (p. 28). Murrell describes this emancipatory educational approach as “critical Africanist pedagogy”— which permits students to develop “a sense of agency,” self-determination, and “the means to deconstruct and decode white supremacy as a *cultural phenomenon* and racism as cultural imperialism” (p. 29). While there is a growing number of students-as-researchers interventions in schools and university-school partnerships, this focus on critical Africanist consciousness or the “moral and spiritual center” Murrell has articulated is not included in these approaches. Emancipatory pedagogy enables students to successfully develop a personal and communal (e.g., pan-ethnic) sense of self that ultimately leads to academic and cultural excellence versus what is deemed to be successful achievement in schools using a Eurocentric metric. This communal sense of self—or group identity—and concern not just for ones individual advancement is what is meant by “cultural excellence” (King, Akua & Russell, *in press*).

Academic excellence cannot be achieved without cultural excellence. From this point of view African American children must be given the opportunity to experience an appropriate cultural education which gives them an intimate knowledge of and which honors and respects the history and culture of our people. Thus, “excellence” in education is much more than a matter of high scores on standardized minimum or advanced competency examinations. Excellence in education and emancipatory pedagogy means “preparing students for self-knowledge and to become a contributing problem-solving member of his or her own community and in the wider world as well. No child can be ignorant of or lack respect for his or her own unique cultural group and meet others in the world on an equal footing” (Hilliard & Sizemore, 1984).

This understanding of educational excellence is supported by research that shows: presenting Black students with a truthful curriculum allows them to develop positive self and group identities and to achieve academic and cultural excellence that is not limited by Eurocentric definitions of academic achievement. In a study of academically successful Black students, D. Carter (2008) found that their “critical race consciousness and pride in being members of the Black community were two elements that enabled them to develop strategies for succeeding in the school context and pursuing their future goals” (p. 20). In

⁴ King (2011) presents examples of ideological assaults on cultural blackness in widely publicized rumors presented as fact—that in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina young Black men in New Orleans, were raping babies, young girls and elderly women. In fact, these young men were the real “first responders” (as firemen and police are described): they demonstrated black cultural ideals by organizing mothers with babies and the elderly to be rescued first—one of the highest expressions of Black people’s cultural virtues. The press also depicted Black men as “looters” while whites in the same circumstances were said to have “found” food and other survival items.



other words, curriculum rooted in culturally relevant ideas (and ideals) will encourage a strong group identity that in turn encourages academic success. That is, positive identification with Black culture provides African American youth with a framework for understanding the role of academics in their lives (P. Carter, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lewis, et al., 2006; Murrell, 2009; Nasir, 2011; Oyserman et al., 2001). From this perspective, a strong cultural or racial identity among African American youth encourages academic success (Murrell, 2007).

It is interesting to also consider how the principles of emancipatory pedagogy embraced by Black educators in the U.S. align with “three urgent tasks” for a liberation psychology in Latin America: 1) recovery of historical memory, 2) “de-ideologizing” everyday experience—and consciousness of the people’s own reality and 3) using the (community’s) people’s virtues (Martín-Baró, 1996, pp. 30-31). We don’t have much opportunity to think about our community in terms of its virtues. After a brief discussion of five principles of emancipatory pedagogy, I will give some examples of what and how we are teaching from this perspective in an after school program, the Songhoy Club.

Five Emancipatory Pedagogy Principles

1) **Conscientization:** Cultivation of a critical consciousness and the ability to read not only the word but also the world—for example, “literacy involves the ability to ‘read’ culture as ‘text’ (Murrell, 1997). For children this means being able to identify and identify with Black cultural ideas (e.g., respect for elders; caring for and teaching younger children) and to explain what has happened to their families, their neighborhood and their people.

2) **Critique of ideology/critique of racism as ideology:** Ideological representations of race and people of color are found not only in the curriculum, but also in popular media images of social life, and these images have to become the object of critical cultural analysis because they block a collective sense of personhood. Students need opportunities to learn how to identify and to deconstruct racist images and narratives about Black people—“assaults on cultural Blackness” in order to develop positive racial/ethnic identities that include a communal view of the self or sense of collective personhood in African cultural terms. “I am because we are—because we are, therefore, I am” is the African philosophical/ontological expression of this cultural ideal (Bhengu, 1999; Mudimbe, 1988).

3) **Cultural agency/resistance to oppression:** Students learn that African Americans have resisted domination and oppression and that they also can stand up for their rights and address community problems.

4) **Dialectical epistemology:** Emancipatory pedagogy engages students in investigating “what knowledge is, what knowledge is worthwhile, the purposes of education.” Students learn about the epistemology of their own cultural community and the value of engaging parents and community elders in



knowledge construction—to appreciate and use our people’s virtues for learning and problem solving.

5) **Cultural/expressive arts:** Teaching *through* culture not just about culture means using cultural forms of expressiveness for learning. Research also indicates that teaching and learning through the culturally based arts supports students’ academic achievement (Hanley & Noblit, 2009).

Each of these pedagogical principles involves the recovery of historical memory, which is discussed next using a specific example of teaching praxis, the Songhoy Club.

Recovering History, Memory and Identity

My doctoral students, who are all accomplished Black teachers, and I developed an emancipatory pedagogy teaching and learning laboratory—the Songhoy Club. In this afterschool program middle school students (aged 11-15) learned about their heritage and about Songhoy culture –“From the Nile to the Niger to the Neighborhood.” The lessons and learning activities we developed use each of these principles of emancipatory pedagogy. “Criterion Standards for Contextualized Teaching and Learning about People of African Descent” also formed Songhoy Club lessons (Goodwin & King, 2006). Below are several of these criterion standards for teaching and learning from an emancipatory Black Studies perspective. The Introduction to these 19 Criterion Standards states:

The continuing omission and misrepresentation of the experiences, histories, and realities of African American students and other people of color from the curriculum—including recent immigrants of color—has resulted in the mass alienation and disengagement of these same students from school and schooling. . . The following Criterion Standards can be used in teacher preparation, curriculum and text development, and standards-based instruction. They can also serve as an assessment tool to determine the adequacy and accuracy of the treatment of people of African descent in school curricula and content standards (p. 1)

- 1) ...Classical Africa was a primary influence on European growth, development and civilization.
- 2) African Diaspora histories begin in Africa with human history, not with the period of enslavement.
- 3) African people’s heritage includes the African presence in Asia, Europe and the Americas...
- 4) History is the recording of the communal acts, movements and experiences within the context of community goals and leadership needs...
- 5) African people are one people, continental and Diasporic.

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- 9) African people have resisted domination and oppression from the earliest period of enslavement. Resistance by African descent people to racism and oppression continues and has taken many social, political, economic and cultural forms, including self-determination, spiritual resilience, and agency in education, cultural expression and community building (e.g., mutual aid societies, benevolent associations, social movements, fraternal lodges, Freedom schools, Kwanzaa, Rites of Passage).
- 10) . . .African descent people’s cultures, both continental and Diasporic, share ontological, epistemological, and axiological orientations—a worldview foundation that is ultimately based on the idea and experience of the oneness and interconnectedness of all in creation. . . .
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- 13) Europeans and their descendants in the Americas targets, enslaved, and dehumanized African people in order to exploit and profit from African technical knowledge, skills, expertise, and cultural assets. . . .
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- 19) ...Africa’s known mineral wealth and other natural resources place it among the world’s riches continents.

Five Model Emancipatory Lessons

The lessons below demonstrate how the Songhoy Club pedagogy reconnected students to ancient African history “from the Nile to the Niger” and to the history of their Southwest Atlanta neighborhood as well. Thus, the students gained “diaspora literacy”—the knowledge and skills to affirm their identity as African and to identify with the experiences of other African people. While this pedagogical approach is “placed-based,” that is, to say, the history of the neighborhood becomes a site of memory, or “lieu de mémoire” (King, 1992) to make these connections possible, this approach also permits students to make ancestral connections. The pedagogy was also supported by interviews with community elders, who were also invited to participate in some lessons. Five lessons are illustrative:

a) “Journey of the Songhoy Princess”: A thirty-minute animated cartoon produced for children by Dr. Edward Robinson presents the history and glorious accomplishments of the Songhoy Empire (e.g., the beautiful city of Timbuktu, the Universities there, etc.). Students learn about ancient Mali and the values of African family life—before the massive enslavement of African people. This is an example of recovering history and memory.

b) *Night John*: This lesson is based on a “young-adult novel” that is actually written for 10 year-olds (Paulsen, 1993). It is about slavery in the American south and begins with a young girl’s experience on a plantation in Georgia waiting for her turn to go to the “slave breeding” shack. This lesson permits students to understand connections between how Black women were treated in the past

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(under slavery) and now (given corporate media images that distort and disrespect the image of Black women and girls). These connections are made through what the students learn about slave-breeding and youth relationship violence: Chris Brown and Rihanna—two popular young hip-hop artists who had a highly publicized problem of domestic violence. He was arrested for assaulting her. All the children in our Songhoy Club had heard about that. But the children didn't know anything about slave breeding. (We were also not sure that this topic was appropriate for children their age.)

Two Songhoy Club teachers co-developed a lesson about these two aspects of historical and contemporary experiences of Black women and girls—mediated by the story of Sarah Baartman, the South African woman, also known as the “Hottentot Venus,” who was put on display as a freak in Europe because of her “unusual” physical shape (Willis, 2010) and hip hop video images that emphasize the Black female body in sexually tantalizing ways. This lesson also provided an opportunity to engage parents in discussions about the criteria for evaluating this lesson in terms of academic and cultural excellence (King, 2011). This is an example of “de-ideologizing” everyday experience and cultivating critical Black consciousness.

c) The Atlanta “race riot” of 1906: Students learn how the Black community resisted and worked together for self-defense when whites in Atlanta “rioted”—killing Black people indiscriminately. Using community-based knowledge about this local history, students learned a more critical account from the perspective of the Black community.⁵ For example, we viewed a documentary video that explained how light-skinned Blacks who could “pass for white” bought ammunition for the Black community's self-defense. The students also learned that economic jealousy was at the root of the violence, not claims that a Black man raped a white woman. Black people were economically prosperous and the main street in Atlanta's Black business district—in the post-Reconstruction segregated period—was Auburn Avenue—which was known as “Sweet Auburn,” the “richest street in the world”. This lesson demonstrates two principles of emancipatory pedagogy for human freedom: Songhoy Club students learned about cultural agency and resistance to oppression and the critique of racism as ideology was another important element of this lesson. The way “light skinned” Black people helped the Black community demonstrated the African philosophical concept, *Ubuntu*: “I am because we are...”

d) Learning Songhoy-Senni language basics: The students learned greetings, classroom protocol and a song in Songhoy-Senni (language). Speaking an African language; learning African values and community virtues through the

⁵ This lesson used the original documentary produced by the late Norman Harris, “When Blacks Succeed: The Atlanta Race Riot of 1906”. Retrieved November 1, 2012:
<http://www.oneworldarchives.org/OWA%20TV/When%20Blacks%20Succeed.htm>



language and song (and folktales) provided opportunities for deepening students' consciousness and historical memory. The students learned to sing a Songhoy-Senni folk song about education, (*Wa Kaa Ir Ma Koy Caw!*)—"Come, let's go to school". When they learned to sing (and perform) this song in the Songhoy language, one of our students said: "If this is what they are singing in Mali, then we need to send some of the kids at this school to Africa, so they can learn about how important school is." This learning experience exemplifies "dialectical epistemology": using our people's virtues for learning and problem solving.

e) Songhoy Club students engaged in critical comparison of Songhoy folk tales and genres of Black orature—long folk poetry that young people learned to recite in previous generations as a rite of passage and contemporary rap music lyrics (Jackson, 1974). The tradition of Black oral folk poetry, including narrative poems, "toasts" and tales, preceded the forms of rhyming and rap that our students know and in which they are so adept. Thus, the students learned about the history of African/Black oral traditions (from the "Nile to the Niger to the neighborhood"). This lesson involved students' using creative and expressive arts and learning through cultural expression. They created their own folk tales after analyzing and comparing Songhoy and African American tales and rap lyrics, and they performed their own rap/poetry informed by the history and cultural values they had engaged in this lesson. Students were also instructed to talk with older family members (parents and grand-parents) to develop a deeper appreciation of community knowledge—learning from members of their own families who could recite the long oral poem: "The Signifying Monkey" (also a "trickster figure" in the African American folk tradition).

These lessons served as a context for the teachers to discuss standards for content and teaching that is developmentally appropriate for boys and girls at different ages. Thus, the Songhoy Club served the learning and professional development needs of teachers in addition to the socialization needs of the students. We discussed these matters with parents whose views were incorporated into the culturally authentic assessment standards.

***Donborey* Pedagogy: Identity Restoration and Reconnecting with Ancestors**

We use the Songhoy word, *Donborey*—which means connecting to the Ancestors—to describe the Songhoy Club pedagogy. Akua has emphasized the importance of identity restoration, which is certainly a task of the Songhoy Club pedagogy:

The purpose of (...) identity restoration is twofold: for the resurrection of African people and the redemption of humanity. Identity restoration requires consciousness. When Black children are exposed to proper cultural and character development, a new mental and spiritual phenomenon emerges. We call it



consciousness. Consciousness is “the expanded awareness of your place in the universe.” Our children need their character and their culture to speak to their consciousness. When this happens, they will be transformed by the renewing of their minds. With this new consciousness comes a new *commitment* (...) to actively participate in the resurrection of African people and the redemption of Humanity. (AKUA, 2012, p. 90)

The Songhoy Club / Songhoy Cosmology

Following are key principles of praxis that inform Donborey pedagogy in the Songhoy Club, which was a pedagogical lab for student, teacher/doctoral student and parent learning. The Songhoy Club teachers included Georgia State University doctoral students who organized the learning experiences and taught the lessons for students in grades 5-8 for two years. The first year the Songhoy Club convened after school three days each week. During the second year the middle school students came to Georgia State University for 4-hour sessions on Saturday mornings. The Songhoy Club’s Donborey pedagogy:

- Makes our African worldview and values e.g., the Songhoy Cosmology, the 7 Cardinal Virtues of Ma’at, (Truth, Justice, Harmony, Balance, Order, Reciprocity & Propriety) and the 7 Principles of Kwanzaa (Umoja (Unity), Kujuchagulia, (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity) and Imani (Faith), available to our community by:
- Using African-centered scholarship to create values-based, standards-aligned lessons that link learning to Heritage knowledge
- Using Criterion Standards for Contextualized Teaching to “re-member” our Heritage— via Ancestral connections. In addition:
- Students learn in order to serve the school and the community
- Students experience a community-building, problem solving classroom environment
- Teachers use “culturally authentic assessment” for visionary parent education in which parents contribute to standards for academic and cultural excellence rubrics.

Thus, collectively we are producing knowledge for and about the community. To conclude, parents and the teachers themselves recovered history and memory along with the students.

The Songhoy Club and the Crisis in Mali Today: A Historical Teaching Moment

The importance of Songhoy heritage study for Black students, parents and teachers is underscored by the fact that Mali’s rich history and culture are currently being destroyed by invading forces under the false flag of radical



Taliban-style Islam. Two-thirds of the northern part of Mali is under occupation by Islamic “jihadists” from various countries who have invaded Mali claiming to want to establish an Islamic state, first in Mali and then throughout Africa and the world. This occupation is the outgrowth of a long-standing problem of racial-ethnic relations in the Sahel region of West and North Africa, which is the ancestral homeland of the Songhoy people (Maiga, 2010). The region, which the nomadic Tuareg claim as their homeland includes Mali, Niger, Mauritania and southern Algeria, and is populated by sedentary groups, the Songhoy, Bella, Peulh (Fulani), as well as the Tuareg nomads. Many among these diverse, historically nomadic “groups” that share the same language (Tamasheq) have wanted to become a separate state since before Mali’s independence from French colonial domination.

The Tuareg have launched numerous armed conflicts that were never completely resolved through numerous peace agreements. In January groups of Tuareg “fighters” returned from Libya with heavy arms and launched this most recent armed rebellion against the Malian government. Arab jihadists—with very different motivations—pushed the Tuareg aside and these groups have since destroyed sacred religious sites in Timbuktu and burned historic manuscripts, which they claim are un-Islamic. These armed invaders have forced Sharia upon the people—including cutting off hands and feet and stoning a couple to death because they had a child without being married. The Malian army and the national government—complicated by a military coup—are unprepared or unable to defend the territorial integrity of the nation and to protect the people. Thousands have fled to neighboring countries or to the southern part of Mali. Meanwhile, in northern Mali there is no school for the children and there is widespread starvation and disease. Women and children are suffering in particular.

In conclusion, the Songhoy Club will become an online program and *Donborey* pedagogy will be available to students globally, in order to use emancipatory pedagogy to provide opportunities for students, teachers and parents to engage with this now threatened and inaccessible world patrimony and heritage of African people.

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