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## Creating a Comprehensive Broad Based Curriculum Model For Adult and Alternative High School Education Based in the African Centered Paradigm

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# **Creating a Comprehensive Broad Based Curriculum Model For Adult and Alternative High School Education Based in the African Centered Paradigm**

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**Abstract:** In this session we will explore the history of challenges to the African centered paradigm, and how to design a comprehensive curriculum model and lens for use with African American adult student's ages 17 years old and up.

## **Interests in the African Centered Paradigm Manifest in my Work and Life**

My interests in designing curriculum is manifest in my life through several important channels, first I learned about the Africentric paradigm as part of my professional preparation in the field of Adult Education. I completed an eight month research study involving interviews, literature review, classroom observations, and examination of historical documents for my dissertation and this paper presents some of what I've learned.

In this session we will explore some of what I have learned and time will be available for interaction and discussion about what other scholars can contribute or expand on the curriculum.

## **Commitment to African American Values**

The values I admire and seek to live by and encourage in young people include the following: hope, hard work, determination, respect, dignity, preserving our cultural heritage, restoring Africa to its rightful place on the world stage of history, building today for a better future for our children in the next generations, overcoming racial oppression, race stigma, reversing hegemony while creating space for equality, working toward the eradication of class oppression and white privilege, patriarchy, and gender equity.

## **Purpose of this Paper**

The purpose of this Paper is to present the steps that I followed in creating a comprehensive broad based African centered curriculum model and to expand on Asante's concept of an African Lens by which teachers and other educators can analyze material for inclusion in the teaching materials that they use with Black students in secondary education. "The term curriculum model refers to a conceptual framework and organizational structure for decision making about educational priorities, administrative policies, instructional methods, and evaluation criteria. Although they vary in their underlying premises, curriculum models provide well-defined frameworks to guide program implementation and evaluation." Goffin, 2001

## **Research Study**

The research study that I completed over an eight month period involved interviews from 90 minutes to two and half hours with the following educators: City Councilwoman Mrs. Joann Watson, Anjua Nafatari (teacher), Marvis Cofield (Detroit School Board Member), Steve Jackson (parent), Pa Joof (principal), Jamillah Kareem (principal), Dr. Cynthia Felton (Educational Consultant), Mukasa Willie Riggs (SNCC Activist), Taki Raton (principal), and Phillip Jackson (Executive Director African American Mentoring Program).

I interviewed each participant with a series of more than 20 questions, recording most of the discussions with digital recorders and two using video and audio equipment. I had the transcripts professionally prepared by a corporate service, and maintained hand written notes as well. I maintained my recording on disks, on the hand held digital recorder, my lap top and desk top computers.

### **Findings**

One element of misunderstanding that often occurs is the perception that African Centered Educators and scholars wish to do away with the western educational system wholesale. In reality what African centered Educators wish to promote in educating Black students, is the idea that not only should these students study the concepts of the western educational system, but additionally on top of this knowledge base should be included an African center to the overall body of study.

The main problems identified through this paper exist at three levels, Systemic level, Teacher level, and Student level. The problems which follow below were identified and researched through a Literature Review, Field Interviews, Student Observation, scholarly analysis, and reporting of Findings.

#### *Systemic Level*

The current education system is built on the idea that western ways of knowing (including right to criticize other theories) are superior to all others and that any challenges are “not bound to be respected.” Just as in the famous case of Plessey vs. Ferguson, there were no rights due a Black man, “bound to be respected” by white men. African centered educators or scholars spend so much time defending the right to have such a paradigm that they don’t get to the contents, materials, and substance of African principles. From this lack of respect for the paradigm grows the related notion, though often unspoken, that there is also no right to criticize other western educational systems by people of color.

#### *Teacher Level*

Over the course of many interviews repeatedly the educators mentioned that their teaching staff members did not have enough knowledge to teach the curriculum and integrate elements of the paradigm into the subject areas in which they were already trained. Several of the principal’s also mentioned that efforts to promote staff development were hampered by a lack of commitment on the part of school districts to provide sustained professional staff development training programs extending beyond three years or more.

#### *Student Level*

Under the current education system, by the time most students reach high school resources are being focused on much younger children in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. For example, The Chicago Public School system has launched a ten year initiative to open 100 new schools to counter the dropout rate, increase academic achievement, reduce the number of students at risk of academic failure, and alleviate overcrowding. This initiative has funded a majority of schools which are elementary sites for grades kindergarten through eighth grade.

The main problems identified by means of the Literature Review included the reality that currently so much time is spent by African Centered Educators introducing and re-presenting the

paradigm as a legitimate “field of study” and defending the “right to exist” of the paradigm that there is little room for an academic discussion about material resources. Continuous need to defend the paradigm is closely related to four concepts: western domination of all educational material and structures, lack of respect for Black African educators as a group of scholars capable of scholarship or criticism, and the lack of respect for the revision of western history in an effort to reclaim Black-African and other people of color- contributions to the universal knowledge base historically.

Problems brought out by the Field Interviews with educators included having large pools of teachers that want to teach Black students in African centered schools, but these teachers lack the academic background knowledge to educate Black students based upon centering in the paradigm; teachers lacked access to ongoing classes and information that would support the development of an African Centered Lens by which to judge or critique and review academic material that they can use in order to teach Black students from their center.

Student Level problems observed were very low self-esteem, poor self-concept, lack of confidence, poor academic skills, little or no study skills, very low reading and math skills usually at least two years behind their age group, record of very few academic credits earned prior to dropping out of regular high school, and very low academic comprehension skills.

Another painful reality observed, especially amongst African American male dropouts was that most had contact with the criminal justice system, either had been arrested, were on probation/parole, awaiting trial/sentencing, were wearing court ordered monitors, and were regularly reporting and paying for probation office services, had served time in juvenile or adult detention or had served time for 60 days or more.

***Components of an African Centered curriculum include the following elements:***

- African philosophy respect, honesty, honor, ethical behavior, selflessness, self motivation, valuing the community over the self, compassion, grace, and dignity. African philosophies integration of the principles of Kwanzaa, Maat, and other ancient wisdom concepts naturally should be included in any curriculum model.
  
- Creation of African inspired visual aesthetic including pictures of continental landscapes, African art primitive, ancient, and contemporary, community based murals documenting local “strivings” and struggle, portraits of Black hero’s/inventions/literature, teaching of African languages, incorporation of dress, music, cultural aesthetic, food/recipes, forms of entrepreneurship, dance forms, and dramatization of wisdom lessons.
  
- African American community organizing tools used throughout social movements: Use of small group and large group village-style teaching groupings, focus on identifying their own human condition, realizing the causes of their condition, formulating a strategy to understand the problems that they face as well as those faced by their family and community, story telling and counter story telling in an effort to better analyze conditions, and move toward political action to seek transformation and become better educated in order to achieve higher level of education for the uplift of the race.
  
- Promotion of students developing sense of history, a sense of self-esteem, self reliance, self-reflection, personal commitment and responsibility for care or stewardship of their community and all of its members young and old.

●Commitment on the part of educators to differentiated instructional or teaching strategies including the following: teacher acting as a facilitator in a student-centered learning environment, student peer teaching/tutoring, implementing multiple ways of assessment, students participate in curriculum development, identifying and building upon student differences, maintaining high expectations of students, scaffolding lessons, using transparent teaching methods, recognize and using different student learning styles, and integrating real world or lived experiences of the students into everyday instruction.

The action required under the African centered paradigm is part of what I suspect makes it as a form of cultural criticism, so threatening to its critics. Whenever people of color develop an independent set of ideas or ideals and begin to act in their own self interest it seems that the “old guard, keepers of the western tradition” view it as a threat to modern society. In my opinion the real danger is not to western society, but the threat is the possible dismantling of white supremacy and hegemony.

### **Components of an African Centered Lens:**

“If we can, in the process of materializing our consciousness, claim space as agents of progressive change, then we can change our condition and change the world.” (Asante, 2003 ) The purpose of creating a Lens is to assist African Centered educators in reading texts and locating their origins in relationship to the Africentric method. The steps in the process of analysis include the following:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Locate the text in time and space (chronologically determine) where it originated, who the author is, and what place it was written in;
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Is the text centered in Africa or is it dislocated, disoriented or de-centered;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Is the text grounded in personal or conceptual myth;
- 4<sup>th</sup> Does the text, involve concrete realities of lived experiences;
- 5<sup>th</sup> Does the text involve historical experiences;
- 6<sup>th</sup> What is the author’s attitude, direction and language (results in uncovering the imagination of the writer) and;
- 7<sup>th</sup> Where does the author stand in relation to his or her own text (centered or marginalized).

I am claiming this space as an Africanist and by my action as a researcher and educator, proclaiming progressive change as my goal in reforming the western educational system of which I and my students are a part. Through the development of my study, my emersion into the research, and centering of my activities in the African paradigm I have operationalized the dual collection model articulated by Asante. Africanists can claim space, mark our areas off and attack white supremacist doctrine, through the development and use of a broad array of intellectual tools then we can dismantle western hegemony. Having the territory or area marked, and understanding where in human space and time students are situated will empower them by giving them the tools with which to analyze their own economic, academic and political condition. If Black students can analyze their condition and reflect at a very deep level the elements that are destroying their own communities then they can design the changes that must be made to improve their own condition and we will have created a force most powerful. (Asante, 2005)

### **Conclusions**

I have designed the curriculum model and expanded the Lens in an effort to begin executing my findings as a means of taking action as required by the African centered paradigm in order to further the education options, strategies, and teaching and learning in the classroom that will ultimately assist Black adult and alternative education students wherever they find themselves being educated by progressive school systems and educational reformers.

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