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Educational Reforms: An Afrocentric Critique and New Approaches

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"A new approach is necessary because the literature is virtually silent on the views of Black people themselves, dealing almost exclusively with European scholars whose analyses are inevitably coloured by European views of Black people."

The purpose of this presentation is to reexamine the approaches to educational reform, both curricular and methodological, from a new orientation. The focus will be on reforms that are meant to have an impact on the Black community. A new approach is necessary because the literature is virtually silent on the views of Black people themselves, dealing almost exclusively with European scholars whose analyses are inevitably coloured by European views of Black people. Our analyses, which we call Afrocentric (1), provide a new perspective because as African women we believe that we are privy to insights into the behavior of Black people that are absent from the literature. We believe that Afrocentrism is fundamentally about new orientations towards data and is attempting to formulate a new orientation by providing new yardsticks against which research should be judged. This new Afrocentric orientation to data pushes the debate into another realm where theory or the methodology becomes subservient to the wellbeing of people being researched.

This presentation is in two parts. The first part will examine curricular change and will provide a critique of the interdisciplinary approaches to antiracist education. The focus will be on university based reform. The argument will be presented that neither the reform process on its own, nor the altered curriculum, ought to be sufficient for afro centric scholars but we must also consider how these are to be used to effect real change in the lives of real people. It will be argued that this must be done by connecting the change to the actual structures within the university, such as its policies and its decision making structures. The position is taken that these cannot be done in isolation, but that the connection must be made with all stakeholders. The change process must be supported and affected by both the university administration as well as the community and the two efforts must be intertwined.

The second part of the presentation reexamines the creation of theory within the human sciences. It is being argued that Eurocentric criteria, such as scientific objectivity, reliability, and validity that are traditionally used to judge such theories are inadequate at best, and at worst, deliberately misleading. We argue that such criteria can only unearth part of the story and therefore, are untrue because they bear little relationship to the lives of real people. The presentation will use the current debate into race and IQ as an illustration.

We have formulated a set of five Afrocentric research criteria which we call canons that are based on Molefi Asante's Afrocentric principles of Ma'at and Nommo (Asante, 1987 & 1990). These are truth, harmony, justice, community, and commitment, and as we will argue, legitimate inquiry must satisfy these five canons. These five Afrocentric criteria shift the focus to the requirement that the researcher emphasize considerations of how knowledge is structured and used over the need for dispassion and objectivity; that the researcher reject the researcher/subject separation and not presume to be "the well from which spring theory and practice, whole and well-formed," but that theory and practice should be informed by the actual and aspired interests of the community; that the researcher actively avoid creating, exaggerating, or sustaining divisions between or within communities, but should strive to create harmonious relationships between and within these groups; that a research procedure be fair to all participants, especially to those being researched, and one whose applications are mindful of the welfare of all the participants; and that the research be grounded in the experiences of the community being researched. That is, that the experiences of community members become the ultimate authority in determining what is true and therefore becomes the final arbiter of the validity of research about their lives.

PRESENTERS

Ruth Reviere comes from the Caribbean, from St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Her pre-university education took place in the Caribbean, after which she left for the UK to read physics at the University of Manchester. On completion of her bachelor's degree she returned to St. Vincent and taught there for a number of years, returning to the UK in 1986 to read for a Master of Science degree in physics education, this time at the University of Liverpool. When in the Caribbean she works with the Caribbean Examinations Council as an Examiner in physics and electricity.

Ruth values personal commitment and employs this as a focus for her current research activities. Professionally, she has headed the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Science Teachers' Association until her departure in 1991 and is an organizer of the Caribbean Regional and National Science Fairs. Since her arrival in Canada, she has become involved in issues involving education in the Black community and is a member of the African Canadian Education Project and the Black Educators' Association.

Ruth has completed a Master's degree in education at Dalhousie and is currently working towards her doctorate. Her area of interest involves the current research in racial differences in IQ that is coming out of U.S. and Canadian universities. She hopes to place this in its social and political context and to assess the impact of such research on the education of black children.

Janis Jones-Darrell, an African Nova Scotian indigenous to Canada, holds a B.A., REd., M.A. and a Certificate in Personnel Management and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. on a part-time basis. She is an experienced educator in administrative management; stakeholder liaison program coordination; teaching counseling; staff professional development; writing/research; educational and employment institutional policy change;

and strategic planning.

She has worked extensively in the areas of race relations, cross cultural understanding, human rights, and anti-racist education over a twenty-five year period in educational institutions and a variety of other domains, including consulting. Many of her accomplishments have been at the community, public school, university, provincial government, and federal government levels.

Academic presentations and leadership in educational institutes have been provided for the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, the Canadian Education Association, the Canadian Association for the Study of Law and Education, the Federation of Municipalities, The International Association of Archivists, and the Board of Commissioners of Chiefs of Police, to name a few. She has published in three books, produced four videos, edited conference proceedings, written journal articles, resource lists, research results, and a variety of papers and proposals.

Jones-Darrell has been awarded several grants, educational fellowships, and received a medal for her community work which is in honor of the 125th anniversary of Canadian Federation.