

Teaching African American Students

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Agenda

Double
Consciousness and
Structural
Inequities

African
American
Culture

Portraits of
Culturally Relevant
Teaching

African American
Language

African Americans and Double-Consciousness

- “One ever feels his (sic) two-ness—an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

■ W. E. B. DuBois

Educating African American Students

- *It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.*

■ W.E. B. Dubois

- Our classrooms do not exist in a vacuum separate from society.
- Schools are a microcosm of society.
- Classrooms are not neutral.

We live in a society that is stratified by race.

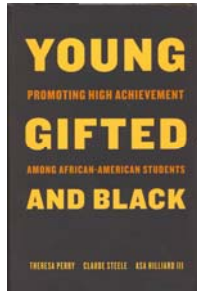
- Rank the six ethnic groups according to which holds the most status in American society.
- 1= most status
- 6= least status
- African American
- Asian American
- Biracial American
- European American
- Latino American
- Native American

Because of prevailing negative imagery, depictions, and structural inequities in society, many people have difficulty focusing on the existing strengths, wisdom, and possibilities in Black children, families and communities.



- For a number of complex reasons not inherent to the children, families, and communities themselves (but beyond the scope of this presentation), African American children are arguably the ethnic group with the greatest and most consistent need in U. S. schools (Hammond, Hoover, McPhail, 2005).
- They rank last behind every other ethnic group and as noted by the Secretary of Education, Margaret Spelling, "too many African American students have been shortchanged by our nation's schools" (Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/achieve/nclb-aa.html>, April 15, 2007, no pagination).
- A primary factor in the continued existence of such inequities is a pervasive and rarely examined deficit perspective used to judge children of color (Boutte, 2002; Boutte & Strickland, 2007; Volk & Long, 2005).

- African Americans students face challenges unique to them as students in American schools at all levels.
- African Americans are devalued in this society.
- Contemporary conversations about African American achievement ignores these societal facts and seriously distort the debate.



Perry's Assumptions for Her Theory

- 1. Being a member of a racial caste group automatically brings with it some challenges for making an ongoing commitment to achievement.
- 2. This influences effort optimism.
- 3. Society's ideology of intellectual inferiority also fundamentally affects commitment to achievement over time.
- For no other group has there been such a persistent, well-articulated, and unabated ideology about their mental incompetence.



- What extra psychological, social and cognitive competencies are required for African Americans in order to achieve at high levels in school?
- Concrete examples of overarching ideology of African American moral, cultural, and intellectual deficiencies
- Stereotype Threat—Claude Steele



Census Data 2005

Ethnic Group	National Percentage
African Americans	12.3 %
American Indian and Alaskan Native persons	0.8%
Asian Americans	4.3%
Latino or Hispanic persons (also included in other categories so total percentage may exceed 100%)	14.4%
White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin	66.9%
Other (two or more races; other race)	1.3%

- In nearly half of the states (24), African Americans are the largest group of people of color.
- Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

• <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/bhmcensus1.html>

- Ten states with 1 million or more African-Americans (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia) are in the South.
- The remaining seven are California, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.
- Combined, they account for more than 80 percent of the nation's African-Americans. New York has the largest African-American population (3.2 million), with California, Texas, Florida and Georgia also exceeding 2 million.
- Georgia—29%

Two Stories of Black America

- One of success
 - Senator Barack Obama
- One of challenges
 - *State of Black America, 2007*

Successes

- One story celebrates the extraordinary fact that:
 - Some of this country's top financial institutions have Black chief executives
 - A Black woman is president of an Ivy League university
 - The current and previous secretaries of state are Black Americans
 - A Black coach led his team to victory in the Super Bowl
 - The college graduation rate of Black women has never been higher
 - Homeownership by Blacks is as high as it has ever been
 - Blacks have penetrated nearly every barrier in law, business, medicine, sports, education, politics and public service.

A Story Too Often Told

- A quarter of all Black Americans live below the federal poverty level, a poverty rate about twice the national rate.
- More than a third of all Black children live in poverty and almost two-thirds grow up in a home without both parents.
- In some cities, more than half of all Black boys do not finish high school, and by the time they are in their 30s, almost six in 10 Black high school dropouts will have spent time in prison.
- Half of all Black men in their 20s are jobless
- More Black men in prison than enrolled in college (Cradle to Prison Pipeline—Children’s Defense Fund).
- The typical Black household earns only about 60 percent of the earnings of White households and has a net worth only about 10 percent that of Whites.
- The HIV/AIDS rate is highest for Black Americans and Blacks are more often the victims of inadequate healthcare and preventable health maladies.
- Educational Inequities

Contemporary African American Families

- Diversity Among Families (SES, structure, etc.)
- Geographic Distribution (South, North, West)

“The education of any people should begin with the people themselves, but Negroes thus trained have been dreaming about the ancients of Europe and about those who have tried to imitate them.” (p. 33)

The Miseducation of the Negro

African American Children

“African-American children are not tabula rasas and they certainly are not simply inadequate dark skinned white children.”

A. Wade Boykin

African American Cultural Legacies and Strengths

- Oral Tradition
- Extended Families/ “Fictive Kinship”/Communalism
- Spirituality
- Black Church
- Rhythmic Movements Expression
- Positive Racial Attitudes
- Perseverance
- Respect for Mothers
- Volunteerism & Service to Others

African American Culture

(Boykin, 1983, 1994; Shade et al., 1997; Hale, 2001; Hale-Benson, 1986; Hilliard, 1992)

1. Spirituality
2. Harmony
3. Movement
4. Verve
5. Affect
6. Communalism
7. Expressive Individualism
8. Oral Tradition
9. Social Time Perspective

**These aspects should be central in the curriculum and instruction for African American students.

Boykin, 1983; 1994

- Spirituality– an approach to life as being essentially vitalistic rather than mechanistic, with the conviction that nonmaterial forces influences people’s everyday lives
- Harmony- the notion that one’s fare is interrelated with other elements in the scheme of things, so that humankind and nature are harmonically conjoined
- Movement– an emphasis on the interweaving of movement, rhythm, percussiveness, music, and dance, all of which are taken as central to psychological health

- Verve– a propensity for relatively high levels of stimulation and for action that is energetic and lively
- Affect– an emphasis on emotions and feelings, together with a specific sensitivity to emotional cues and a tendency to be emotionally expressive
- Communalism– a commitment to social connectedness, which includes an awareness that social bonds and responsibilities transcend individual privilege

- Expressive individualism – the cultivation of a distinctive personality and proclivity for spontaneous, genuine personal expression
- Oral tradition – a preference for oral/aural modes of communication, in which both speaking and listening are treated as performances, and cultivation of oral virtuosity—the ability to use alliterative, metaphorically colorful, graphic forms of spoken language
- Social time perspective— an orientation in which time is treated as passing through a social space rather than a material one, and in which time can be recurring, personal, and phenomenological

- Given that culture is influenced by and shifts across contexts such as socioeconomic class, geography, and age, it is not assumed that any culture is monolithic and static.
- However, it is equally problematic to negate the existence of culture at all (Seidl, 2007).

Using Research-Based Findings About Cultural Groups

- **Culture is too important to be overlooked or disregarded—must become familiar with the literature.**
- **Yet, information about cultural groups should not be overgeneralized since there is a tremendous amount of variation within cultures.**
- **These two seemingly oppositional concepts must be considered simultaneously.**
- **Works to consult: G. Pritchey Smith; Asa Hilliard; Patricia Guild**

Comparative Framework: African American and European American Values and Traditions (Ford, 1999, p. 7)

African Americans	European Americans
Extended family—strong family and fictive kinship bonds	Nuclear Family
Spiritual	Religious
Cooperation; social-oriented; mutual independence; collectiveness	Competition; task-oriented; independence; individuality
Multilingual (Ebonics)	Monolingual
Situation oriented	Time oriented
High context communication; verbal and non-verbal	Low context communication; verbal
Obedience to elders and adult authority	Obedience to authority

Because of the “double consciousness” of most African Americans, even academically successful Black students have to make adjustments that are not necessarily psychologically healthy.

Academically Successful Black Students (Ogbu)

- Assimilators– disassociate themselves from Black cultural frame of reference and identity in favor of White cultural frame of reference (“cultural passing”)
- Emissaries – play down Black identity and cultural frame of reference in order to succeed in school and in mainstream institutions by mainstream criteria, but they do not reject Black culture and identity.

- Alternators – adopt the immigrant minority students’ strategy of accommodation without assimilation (Code-switch)
- Regulars– similar to alternators. Accepted as regular members of street culture, but do not subscribe to all its norms. Get along with everyone without compromising their own values (Good students and street smart)
- Ambivalents – conflicted between two lifestyles; erratic academic success

- Morgan (African American as cited in Fordham, 1988). “Last year, the student council president, who was black, wanted to set aside a day to honor {Dr.} Martin Luther King. A lot of blacks said that it was a good thing to do, but a lot of whites said it was a waste of time and was not fair.... I felt hurt that they {my White friends} would accept me as a black person but not accept the idea of honoring a black person.... One of my white friends said, ‘I don’t see you as a black friend, but as a friend.’ But I want them to look at me for what I am. *I am a black person* {emphasis added}.”

○ Emissary

○ To blacks, I was all of the above and extremely stuck up. I pretended not to see them on the street, spoke to them only when spoken to and cringed in the presence of blacks being loud in front of whites. The more integrated my Catholic grammar school became, the more uncomfortable I was there. I had heard white parents on TV grumbling about blacks ruining their schools; I didn't want anyone to think that I, too, might bring down Sacred heart Academy. So I behaved, hoping that no one would associate me with "them" (Black Americans).

○ Assimilator

What do teachers need to effectively teach African American students?

- Deep content knowledge
- Strong pedagogical content knowledge.
- Culturally relevant pedagogy

● Martin, D. B. (2007). Beyond missionaries or cannibals: Who should teach mathematics to African American children? *The High School Journal*, 91 (1), 6-28.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

- [Wiz.ppt](#)
- Mirrors and Windows
- Good And Bad "Witches"—The Role of Teachers

- Culturally relevant pedagogy refers to instruction that is modified to include specific knowledge about the culturally-influenced and varied ways of thinking, believing, learning, and communicating and how they impact the education process (King, 1994).
- It is NOT prescriptive. That is, “it is not a series of steps that teachers can follow or a recipe for being effective with African American students “ (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 26)

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

- Successful teaching focuses on students' **academic achievement**.
- Successful teaching supports students' **cultural competence**.
- Successful teaching supports students' **socio-political consciousness**.

● P. 109-110

- Gloria Ladson Billings

“I ain't writin' nuttin': Permission to fail and demands to succeed in urban classrooms”

Portraits of Teachers Who Normalize High Achievement

- [afros.photos.abbreviated.ppt](#)
- [jennifer.strickland.abbrev.ppt](#)
- [hair.text.set.bboxes.ppt](#)
- [Nichole Folsom.ppt](#)

Getting Started—Teachers can ...

- Brainstorm ways that you can transform a lesson that you currently teach into a culturally relevant lesson.
- What aspects of your classroom would have to change in order to become more culturally relevant (e.g., daily routines, contact with families and communities, literature)?