


Why are there no inner-city
democratic schools run by
Black parents and/or adults
with significant numbers of
Black children in the school?

Presented August 15, 2008
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Background

- Talks with Isaac Graves initially concerned the lack of diversity at AERO conferences
- Yet, not just AERO: Although urban alternative school students are, in general, mainly males and then mainly Black, other alternative education conferences also lack Black/Latino attendees proportional to society
- I thought the issue might be stated best as: Can urban children do democratic schools?
- Some AERO Yahoo group members suggested, “Will inner-city parents allow their children to go to a free school?”
 - Isaac and I decided on this title:



Why are there no inner-city
democratic schools run by
Black parents and/or adults
with significant numbers of
Black children in the school?



Summary

This slide essay surveys the contributions of African Americans to the alternative education movement. It seeks answers to why many of this group question the relevancy of past and current progressive concepts and methods associated with alternatives such as “child-centered,” “holistic,” open classrooms, and free schools.

The review will cover various theories that may explain the many issues involved. Readers will ponder why black middle-class educators and white middle class progressives view such classroom concerns as freedom, reading instruction, and discipline quite differently.

It will discuss what these theorists, critics, and progressives have in common and what each could learn from the other. Recommendations conclude the essay.



Democratic Schools/Free Schools

- What is Democratic Education? (Loflin, 2006)
 1. Democratic processes

School/classroom governance, citizenship education via study and community involvement/civic-political action
 2. Freedom to choose, learning without compulsion

In any educational setting, young people have the right to decide individually how, when, what, where and with whom they learn
 3. Global aspects, self-actualization

Emphasize global human rights, the community, the environment, and individual development

Early Progressive influences*

- Jacques Rousseau 1712-1778 French
- Johan Heinrich Pestalozzi 1746-1827 Swiss
- Friedrich Wilhelm Fröbel 1782-1852 German
- Maria Montessori 1870-1952 Italian
- Rudolf Steiner 1861-1925 German
- Jean Piaget 1896-1980 Swiss
- A. S. Neil 1883-1973 Scottish

*Due to my ignorance, contributions from those other than European (cultures/societies) are not cited: Suggestions are welcome



Progressives in USA

- child-centered
- real-life experiences
- community based learning that brought school/community together to promote democratic ideals
- Branson Alcott 1799-1888
- John Dewey 1859-1952
- William A. Wirt 1874-1938

1890-1940: Public School as Melting Pot



Early 1900s

“We were Americanized”

Gary, IN

The 1950s

- Progressive education faltered after WW II due to the Cold War and especially with the Russian launch of the “Sputnik” satellite

- **National Defense Act 1958**

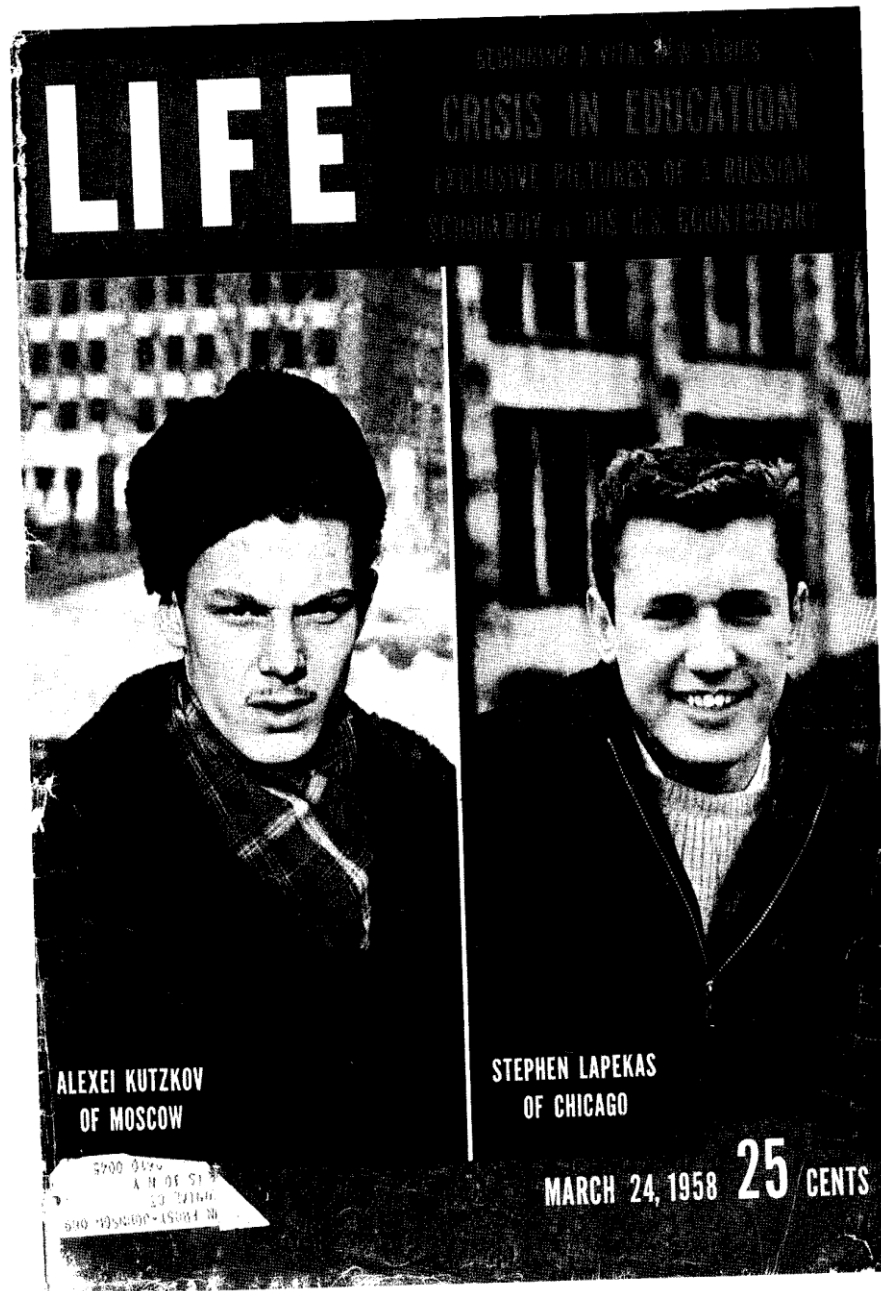
Replaced more progressive interests with:

- ☐ grouping by ability
- ☐ increased competition
- ☐ tracking into college prep along with vocational business tracks
 - ☐ tracks determined by counselors according to test results

“Crisis in

USSR

March 24



Education”

USA

1958



Detractors to the competition and national interest emphasis of Defense Act believed:

- the child was being schooled rather than educated
- schools were fitting kids into national norms and manpower needs of country
- the act promoted the reason for going to school is economic
- schools needed to focus on social/economic inequalities also

The 1960s: Anti-establishment

- Back to nature:
 - environmental movement
 - organic foods
- Women's lib movement
- Anti-war movement
- Appalachia
 - culture
 - coal labor/environment
- Sexual revolution
 - The Pill
 - free love movement
 - gay rights
- LSD
- Anti-poverty program
 - HUD, CAP, Head Start/Upward Bound
- Civil Rights Movement
 - Chicano power
 - Voting rights
 - Black power
 - African studies
 - Black Student Unions
- Alternative education movement

Two sources of alternative education movement

Source 1: Civil Rights Movement writers*

- James Baldwin *Notes of a Native Son* 1953
- Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* 1961
- James Baldwin *The Fire Next Time* 1963
- Alex Haley *Autobiography of Malcolm X* 1964
- Kenneth B. Clark *Dark Ghetto* 1965
- Eldridge Cleaver *Soul on Ice* 1968

More Civil Rights Movement: Education and Black Power movement writers

- Carter G. Woodson *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* 1919; *The Mis-education of the Negro* 1933
- Clyde Halisi & James Mtume *The Quotable Karenga* 1967
- Julius K. Nyerere *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* 1968
- Dora Pantell & Edwin Greenidge *If Not Now When? The Many Meanings of Black Power* 1969
- James Turner “The Sociology of Black Nationalism” in *Black Scholar* 1969

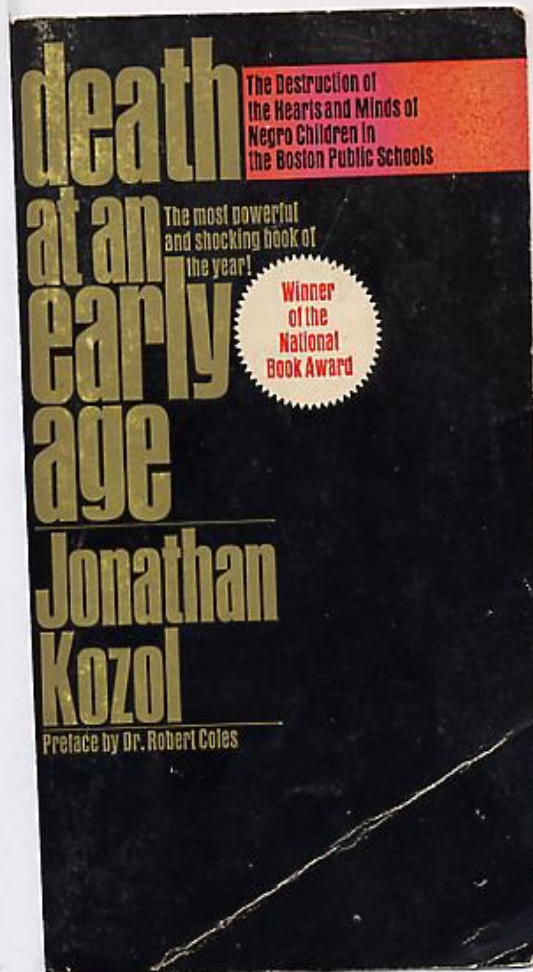
Still more...

- *Black News* Publication of The East Organization 1969-1984
 - Jitu Weusi “The Black Teacher and Black Power” in Nathan Wright’s *What Black Educators Are Saying* 1970
 - Frank J. Satterwhite *Planning an Independent Black Educational Institution* 1971
 - Amiri Baraka *African Congress: A Documentary of the First Modern Pan-African Congress* 1972
- * The period of 1960-1975 was a moment of extraordinary cultural and political transformation among African peoples globally. African nations tore off the chains of colonial domination and themes of self-determination and Black Consciousness arose in America (Kondau, 2005)

Source 2: The return of the romantics

- Just as Romantics like Rousseau reacted to the over-rationality of 18th century Enlightenment thought, 1960s critics reacted to an overly-controlled educational climate
- *Death at an Early Age* Jonathan Kozol 1967
 - Promoted as the “great equalizer,” public schools
 - actually perpetuate the status quo
 - remain segregated by race and class
 - are characterized by mediocre faculty, inferior buildings, racism in curriculum, and repressive teaching methods

1967



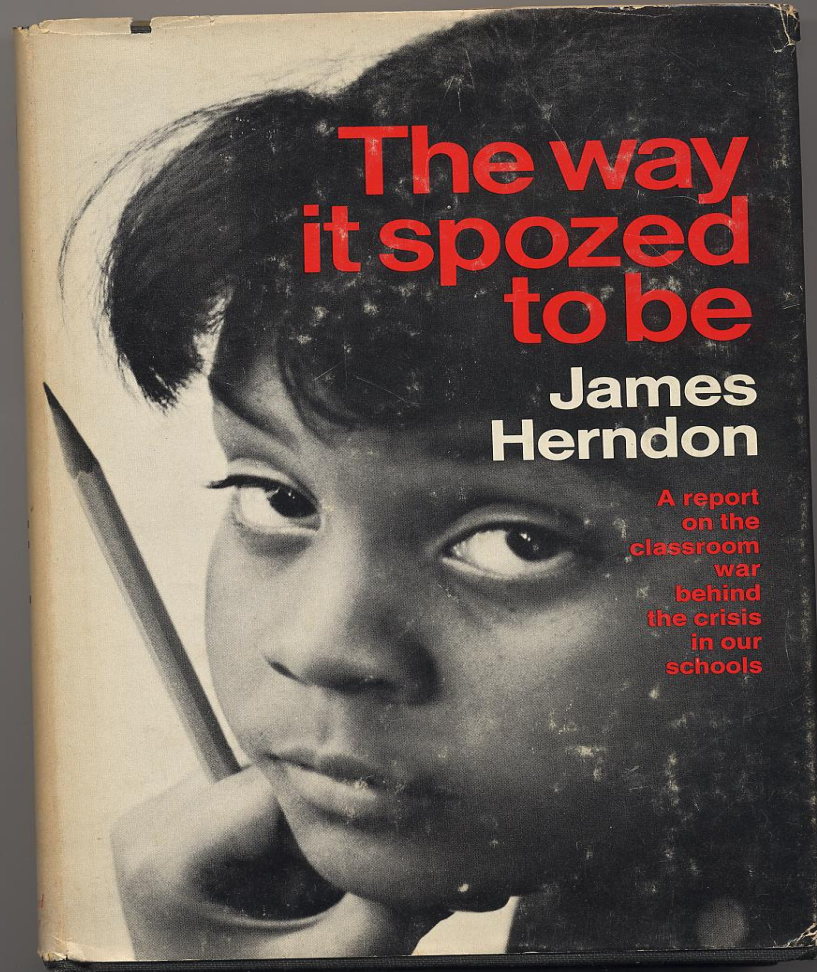
Return of the Romantics: 1960s Writers— Social critics and educators

- Edgar Friendenberg *The Vanishing Adolescent* 1959
- Dan Riessman *Culturally Deprived Child* 1962
- Sylvia Ashton-Werner *Teacher* 1963
- B. Frank Brown *The Non-graded High School* 1963
- Paul Goodman *Compulsory Mis-education* 1964
- John Holt *How Children Fail* 1964

More romantics and critics

- John Holt *How Children Fail* 1964
- James Herndon *The Way It 'Spozed' to Be: Report on the Classroom War behind the Crisis in our Schools* 1965
- Herbert Kohl *36 Children* 1967
- John Holt *How Children Learn* 1967
- Nat Hentoff *Our Children are Dying* 1967
- Kenneth B. Clark, "Alternative Public School Systems" 1968 (*Harvard Educational Review*)

1965



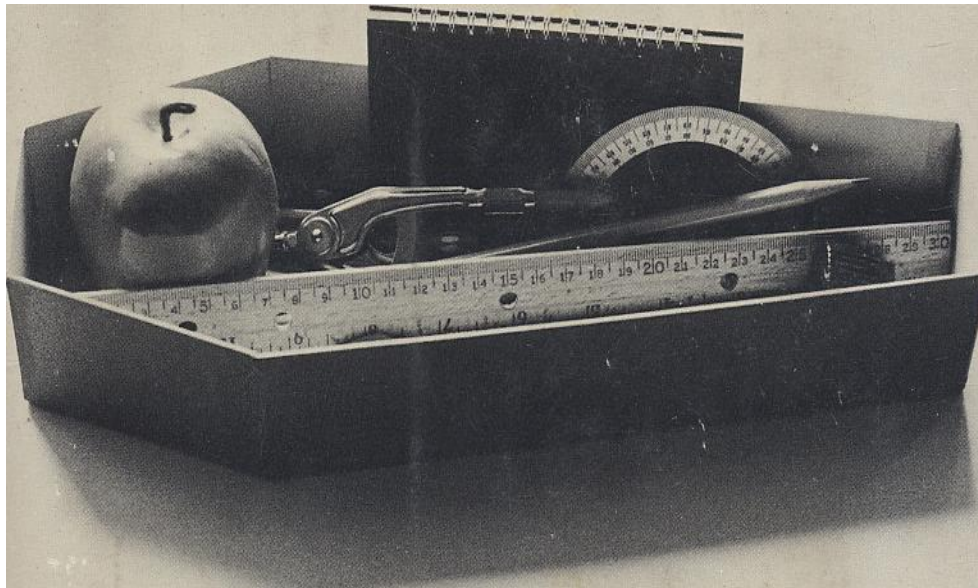
Even more romantics and critics

- Preston R. Wilcox “The Community-centered School” 1968
- George B. Leonard *Education & Ecstasy: Joy--the Unity of Learning and Living* 1968
- Carl Rogers *Freedom to Learn* 1969
- George Dennison *The Lives of Children--A Practical Description of Freedom in its Relation to Growth and Learning: The Story of the 1st Street School* 1969
- Edgar Friedenbergl “Autonomy & Learning” 1969
- Paulo Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 1970

School Is Dead

Alternatives in Education

1967



An Indictment of the system and
a Strategy of Revolution
Everett Reimer



Still more...

- Charles Silberman *Crisis in the Classroom* 1971
- Ivan Illich *Deschooling Society* 1971
- Postman & Weingartner *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* 1971
- Carl Bereiter *Must We Educate? Alternatives to Mass Education* 1973
- Mario Fantini *Public Schools of Choice: A Plan for the Reform of American Education* 1974



Review of African American influence on alternative education

- African Free Schools
- Southern Freedom Schools
- Urban League Street Academies
- Storefront schools
- Independent Black Institutions



African Free Schools: Late 18th century

- State funded schools established in progressive towns like Philadelphia and New York
- Dedicated to the complicated and daring task of preparing young black students for freedom
- A threat to the powerful since not all citizens wanted black children to grow up to inhabit a position of full equality

See www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/

New York City African Free School 1787

- Answered the questions raised by abolitionists:
 - What will a multi-racial New York look like?
 - What should Black children be taught in a school located in the midst of a slave-holding city?
- Goals and curriculum of the school would reflect a profound ambivalence about what to stress
 - Assimilation or racial pride/integrity?
- Absorbed into the New York City public school system in 1835
- Educated thousands of children, a number of whom went on to become well known in the United States and Europe



Southern Freedom Schools

- In the summer of 1964, 41 Freedom Schools opened in the churches, on the back porches, and under the trees of Mississippi
- Students were Mississippians, averaging fifteen years of age, often including small children under 5 to the elderly who had spent their lives laboring in the fields (Emery & Gold, 2001)
- The schools taught self-confidence, voter literacy, political organization skills, and student rights as well as academic skills
- Another distinguishing feature was the Black history curriculum
 - African and US history

See: educationanddemocracy.org/FSCfiles/C_CC3a_GuideNegroHistory.htm

Southern freedom schools influence the free school movement

(Neumann, 2003)

- These “schools” for personal and collective liberation influenced others who sought social change through education
- These activists created “free school” alternatives outside the public system
- They believed if students were given the chance to learn and grow in a climate that was:
 - non-compulsory
 - cooperative
 - democratic
 - child-centeredthey would take these values into the larger community, thus affecting social change
- Southern freedom schools also influenced alternative public schools of choice (Miller, 2002)

Urban League Street Academies

- In 1966 the Greater New York Urban League created the street academy concept
- Borrowed from 1964 Harlem HARYOU program created to decrease dropouts/unemployed
- By 1969 26 “storefront” programs, sponsored also by community/religious groups, in U.S.
- Attracted “...urban students who liked to learn, but just didn’t like school”
- Showed that urban youth could be better served in a different and more sensitive environment than the public schools

Urban storefront schools arose in the 1960s

THE STOREFRONT

A Community of Children on 129th Street and Madison Avenue

1970



Ned O'Gorman

HARPER COLOPHON BOOKS / CN 216 / \$1.25

Illustrated





the lives of children

1969 A Practical description of freedom in its
relation to growth and learning.

The story of the First Street School


George Dennison



Independent Black Schools Movement

“We must transfer our concerns from starting temporary schools to the development of permanent institutions of learning for our nation’s becoming.” -- Juti K. Weusi, Black Books Bulletin

- During the Civil Rights Movement in the mid-1960s, African American communities across the United States asserted and redefined their right to establish systems of education that would serve the real needs of their communities

- 
- Black independent schools: A pragmatic reflection of the cultural revolt of the 60s
 - Stressed Black identity, Black power, and relevant Black education
 - Stressed gaining control of their education by
 - Black Studies programs on college campuses
 - community control of public schools in Black communities
 - or creating independent Black schools, which were controlled by the Black communities

The Black independent school movement

- Nation Of Islam (NOI)

- Most African American independent schools around today opened their doors between 1964 and 1984. NOI schools, during the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement, were alone in teaching Black children an African-centered worldview using Afro-centric pedagogy instead what NOI saw as watered-down, whitewashed curriculum of the public schools. This was instruction and guidance that stressed *self-knowledge* and *self-reliance*.

(Asymah & Perkins, 2001)

Council of Independent Black Institutions: Events leading to its formation in 1972

- US Organization: Formed by Maulana Karenga 1965
- Four national Black power conferences 1966-1969
 - “The nightmare of integration died and was buried at these four conferences...Black nationhood and self-determination were born.”*
- National Association of African American Education (NAAAE): Formed by Preston Wilcox 1968
- California (CAAEE) workshops on Independent Black Institutions at Nairobi College at Palo Alto 1970
 - community control of public schools (most Black children went to public schools)
 - possibilities of independent Black schools
- New York City African-American Teachers Association Convention. Independent schools workshop April, 1972
- Meeting at Frogmore, SC July, 1972



Independent Black Schools

- Relationships were fundamental
 - If the teacher could reach the child at a personal level and related as such, the learning process would be advanced.
 - Teachers and staff were able to:
 - express feelings of connection, affiliation, and solidarity with students and parents
 - be efficient in community norms, culture, and practices
 - communicate with students in a familiar cultural idiom



Current CIBI schools: www.cibi.org

--Washington, DC

NationHouse Watoto Shule/
Sankofa Fie

--Philadelphia, PA

The Ijoba Shule

--Minneapolis, MN

Imhotep Science Academy

--Port Gidson, MS

Community Youth Achievers

--Atlanta, GA

Nsoromma School

Abibitumi Kasa Afrikan Language
Institute

--Trenton, NJ

The Garvey School

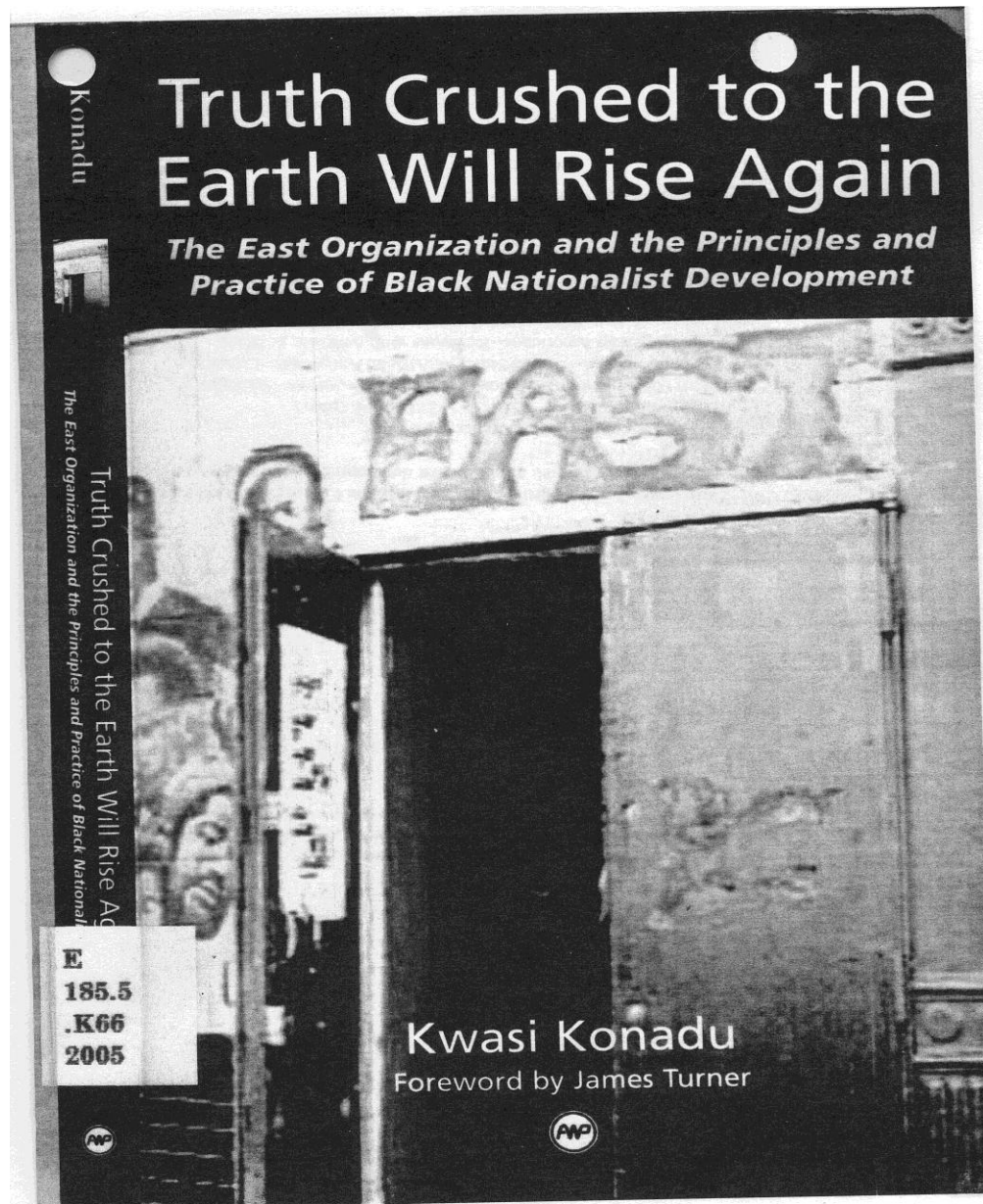
--San Antonio, TX

New World Learning Center
Organization for Black Unity

--St. Louis, MO

Hofi Ni Kwenu Academy
Frederick Douglass Institute
New Afrikan Village

A CIBI school: The East's Uhuru Sasa Schule



The East: A Model of Nationhood

(Kindau, 2005)

- The East (1969-1986 Brooklyn, NY) was a multiplex community institution dedicated to the principles of self-determination, nation building, and Black nationalist consciousness.
- Development of skills and thinking necessary for nationhood and liberation from the dominant political and cultural thought, and behavior:
 - Create a new African personality to protect and preserve Black culture and social structures.
 - Model Nguzo Saba: 7 principles of Blackness

Between 1969-1972 The East created:

- Imanai Child Development Center (pre-school)
- Uhuru Sasa Shule (Freedom Now School) K-12
- Evening School of Knowledge (for adults)
- Akiba Mkuu Bookstore
- Black Solidarity political party
- Restaurant with kitchen/catering service
- Uhuru Food Co-op
- Mavazi Family Clothing Co-op
- *Black News* A widely circulated news publication, respected for its progressive journalistic analysis and coverage of news about the community and its Pan-African perspective
- Printing and publications service
- East Records and recording studio
- Anti-drug council
- African Youth Village

Nation building: Roots of Afro-centric school movement

- Nation building: Conscious focusing of collective resources to the task of liberating and developing the psyche and physical space Africans and Americans can identify as theirs

“Only when (Africans) are clear about the kind of society we are trying to build can we design our educational (and institutional) service to serve our goals.”
-- Julius K. Nyerere, *Unjamaa*

- Sources of African-centered school movement
 - Malcolm X: Black nationalism
 - Maulana Karenga: cultural nationalist theory
 - Freedom Schools efforts of Civil Rights Movement
 - Efforts of Council for Independent Black Institutions

Uhuru Sasa Shule (Freedom Now School): A reaction to the politics of public education

- 1967-8 Blacks in Ocean Hill-Brownsville (central Brooklyn) community struggle with city over control of schools which socialize and education their children.
- Jitu Weusi organizes group of high school students into African American Student Association (ASA) in fall of 1967 over the appropriate institutional and cultural context of education for nationhood.
- Several adults see through the ideological assumptions of liberal Whites, educators, politicians, and policies around decentralization/community control.
- Teachers from African American Teachers Association (ATA) opened night school for ASA youth suspended or expelled from high school.



Freedom Now School: Progressive practices

- A child's way to complete tasks and use skills were never consider wrong. Children were shown other options, but the use of "No, that's wrong," and "Don't," which were considered inhibiting, were avoided.
- Spontaneous curiosity was nourished
- Child's natural learning style was recognized
- Arts integrated into all instruction
- Encouraged small children to be allowed to do meaningful (adult-type) work in their homes, schools, and communities so they could begin to see themselves as capable persons

More progressive methods...

- Students advanced upon demonstration of individual satisfactory academic progress not as a group or by age/grade level
- Cooperation, small groups, and community service were emphasized
- Formal teaching credentials were considered a hindrance to school's purpose: Commitment and cultural knowledge were more important
- Goal of 1970 Teacher Training Institute (John Churchville, director of Freedom Liberty Day School, Philadelphia): develop highly skilled, sensitive, and politicized African teachers

Freedom Now School: Democratic practices

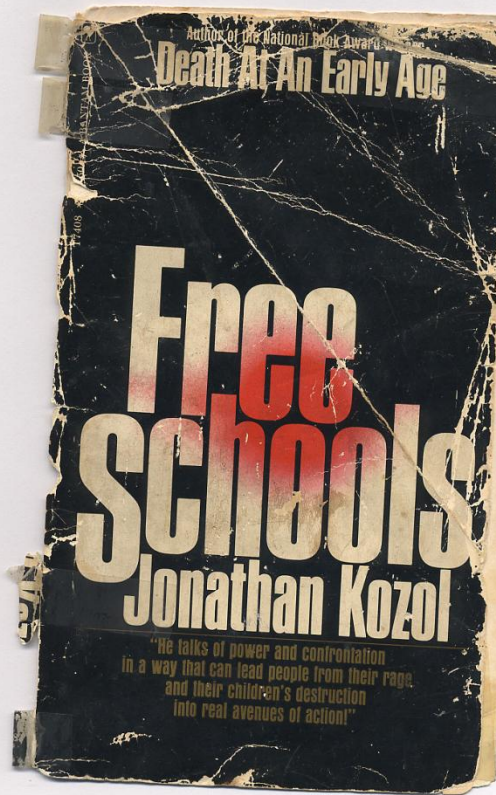
- Governing council (parents/teachers/students):
 - Policy making, fundraising, budget, curriculum, student/teacher relations
- Parent Council:
 - Supervised headmaster
 - Created Guidance Unit (teachers/students):
 - Served families having difficulties
 - Set criteria for student behavior and academic performance

Brooklyn Family Schools 1973

- Brooklyn community of independent schools formed the group
- Organized for the purpose of providing positive educational experiences for Black children
- Based on the belief that community approval, not state approval (accreditation), proves the validity of a school
 - Uhuru Sasa Shule
 - Weusi Shule
 - Al Karim Family School
 - Shule ya Mapinduzi
 - Robert Conner Memorial

The Free Schools Movement

1972



Free School Movement: Underground Publications*

■ From J. Kozol's *Free Schools* 1972

- *Outside the Net*, Lansing, MI
- *The Free Learner*, Sobrante, CA
- *No more teachers' dirty looks*, San Francisco
- *Skool resistance*, Palo Alto, CA
- *How to organize a high school underground*, Wash. D.C.
- *No particular place to go: The making of a free high school*, 1970 Steve Bhaerman & Joel Denker
- *Free the children...The New School Movement in America*, 1972, Tim Afflick & Allen Graubard
- *No more public schools*, 1972, Harold Bennett

*I am not now aware at this time of any similar “underground” publications in the Afro-centric schools movement. Suggestions are requested.

Student Participation: The Student Rights Movement

- Postman & Weingartner *The Soft Revolution* 1971
- Hansen & Jensen *The Little Red Schoolbook* 1969
- Montgomery County (MD) Student Alliance
- Underground student newspapers
 - *After Breakfast* Indianapolis
- Dress Code battle
 - Long hair/sideburns
 - Dresses, skirts, culottes
 - Political expression
- Protests
 - Anti-war
 - Black Power/Chicano Power
 - School boycotts/sit-ins




Other private alternatives to the public schools

- Ferrer's first Modern School, Spain, 1901
- Summerhill, Germany 1921; England 1927
- Play Mountain Place, Los Angeles 1949
- Fernwood Colton, OR 1966
- Tamariki School New Zealand 1967
- CAM Academy Chicago
- The New School Vancouver, BC
- Sudbury Valley School Sudbury, MA 1968

Setting the stage for our discussion: Freedom schools vs. Freedom schools*

- Freedom schools were more community-centered
- Free schools were more child-centered
- African American community was more concerned with what is best for a child as a member of a community, and not so much as what is best for a child as an individual

*From a discussion with former director of the Albany Free School Mr. Chris Mercogliano



Various responses to: Why are there no inner-city democratic schools started/run by African American parents/adults with lots of Black students?

General conjectures*

- Urban children, many of whom come from one parent families, have little supervision, thus they need structure (even cry out for it) and a so-called free school would be nothing but chaos!*

*Comments from African American educators

General conjectures...

- Urban minority children lack discipline, self-control, self-respect, regard for others*
- Urban minority children have been given too much freedom
 - Freedom to fail, do wrong, or ruin their lives*
- Today's "Hip Hop" generation have never been told "No!"
 - Atmosphere at home not strict enough
 - There are either no guidelines or children/youth do not follow the ones set up for them
 - Thus it is up to the school to provide the "missing" structure*
- The permissive child rearing practices and schooling philosophy of over-educated liberal white middle-class teachers and families are inappropriate for urban working class and minority children*

More conjectures...

- Black community must maintain power over its children for the sake of the
 - community--to keep status quo from coming in and taking over or influencing the young
 - Individual's physical/psychological well-being*
- Thus school/classroom control, sternness, serious, no nonsense approach is necessary to show
 - children/youth/families
 - the worldhow serious they (the leaders) are about education*
- The more strict relations with children associated with control and discipline are necessary in Black urban neighborhoods to insure the safety of all concerned
- It is better to be White and illiterate than Black and illiterate



The ideas of Stephanie Patterson

“It’s just different for minorities than for whites.”

Stephanie is African American and an educator, student advocate, and social justice activist in Indianapolis.



*“...there is risk involved in
exercising our freedom...”*

- *“Intellectual freedom and creativity? We’re still Black, a minority still at-risk; we can’t be as creative as whites. We can’t fall back on ‘the majority Eurocentric system’ as well as white children do if their time at a free school is unproductive.”*
- *“We must be conscious of being Black and of whites at all times...there is risk involved in exercising our freedom and gambling.”*



“We can’t ‘afford’ free schools...

“Parents know their kids are not free, white and 21...regardless, you are still Black in the US. We do not have resources and power to protect ourselves if we fail. The consequences of failing are devastating. We can’t ‘afford’ free schools.”

“White children are advantaged from the start and can well be more ‘free’ or leisurely with learning and schooling...thus taking more chances. They won’t pay as high a price as so-called minorities who may never catch up to their white peers if they don’t get the basics.”



The ideas of Dr. Khaula Murtadha

- I agree with most of what Stephanie says.
- I don't agree with the "basics" part. I believe the basics are not Equal Opportunity basics anyway.
- Black parents cannot afford to allow their children to learn at any old time because of the deeply held teacher's beliefs that black children can't learn anyway.

Dean Murtadha is an African American. She heads the School of Education, IUPUI, Indianapolis

The ideas of Dr. Jose Rosario

- *Why would African Americans tend towards more conservative forms to schooling than progressive?*
- Child rearing practices
 - The conservatism typically tied to child rearing practices among the poor/disenfranchised
 - Belief that children's role in the family is mostly to listen, do what they are told, and respect their elders
 - Having been raised that way, parents tend to do likewise--choosing more authoritarian approaches

More ideas of Dr. Jose Rosario

- Lack of a democratic experiences
 - Poor folks are typically not the recipients of democratic practice
 - They tend to be manipulated by others and treat each other in an authoritarian way
 - Power is what counts, and the more power you have the more you can manipulate the other
 - My hunch is that religion also plays a key role in the authoritarian approach to regulation of conduct

Prof. Rosario teaches for the School of Education, IUPUI, Indianapolis



Politics of the (Black) church

- How democratic is the institution of the church?
 - Does this influence family/school practices?
- How much power do/should members have in church decisions?
- How much does the Bible play in the child-rearing or gender politics of the church?
 - “Spare the rod...spoil the child.”
 - Do both men and women proscribe to the subordination of women in the household and so the body of the church?

When do the sheep lead the shepherd?

(Lewis, 2007)

- The pastor answers to the will of God, not the opinions of church members
- Ephesians 4:11 explains church protocols/order of influence: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and then teachers
- Bishops, elders, deacons are elected/ ordained by council of apostles/prophets who are instructed directly by the Holy Ghost (Acts 6:1-8)
- Congregational involvement (voting/ deliberating misconduct of a pastor, church decisions) is not necessary since the oversight of officers, by a properly established protocol, does this

Democracy in the church (Perry, 2007)

- History of top-down decision making
- “Dictator pastors” run church as a personal enterprise
- Although deacons/trustees have Biblical power
 - it’s being scaled back by “rubberstamp cliques” with personal loyalty to pastor
 - pastor appointed deacons can become complacent
 - some new churches do not have deacons or trustees
- Church as New England town meeting
 - Restore traditional power of deacons via elections every 2/4 yrs
 - Based on merit and record of service not personal relationships
 - Balance of power: pastors/deacons have mutual veto power with congregational power to override either veto
 - Church votes on all major decisions and OKs quarterly reports
 - This will encourage members to attend church meetings and voting opportunities



The ideas of Dr. Lisa Delpit

- Essay 1. Skills and other dilemmas of a progressive black educator 1986

Harvard Educational Review 56:4, 379-385

- Essay 2. The silenced dialogue 1988

Harvard Educational Review 58:3, 280-298


Prof. Delpit is director, Center for Urban Education and Innovation
Florida International University

Direct Instruction

- Based on behaviorist model
- Reading taught through direct instruction of phonics generalizations and blending
- The teacher's role is to maintain the full attention of the group by:
 - ☐ continuous questioning
 - ☐ eye contact
 - ☐ finger snaps
 - ☐ hand claps
 - ☐ other gestures (1, 2, or 3 fingers for quieting class)
 - ☐ eliciting choral response
 - ☐ and some sort of rewards system


Essay 1 Delpit's "progressive" education

- While an undergrad at a progressive school of education in the late 60s, she learned these tenets:
 - open classrooms are the most humanizing of learning environments
 - children should be in control of their own learning
 - all children would read exactly when they are ready



Ms. Delpit uses her progressive teacher training while at public alternative school in Philadelphia 1970-76

- Using progressive methods she:
 - created learning stations
 - had students write books & stories to share
 - had students weave to learn math and motor skills
 - threw out the desks
 - carpeted the open learning stations



“They just don’t realize how smart these kids are.”

- Delpit viewed the older Black teachers at the alternative as “repressive”
- They did not provide a learning environment that allowed a child’s intellect to “flourish.” They:
 - Focused on skills
 - Made students sit at desks
 - Made students practice handwriting
 - Corrected oral and written grammar
- She thought that these older teachers just didn’t realize how smart these children were

What happened? How did her students do?

- The White children zoomed ahead
 - They worked hard at the learning stations
 - Did amazing things with books and writing
- The Black children
 - Played the games
 - Learned to weave
 - Threw books around the learning station
 - Practiced Karate moves on the new carpet
 - Some learned to read, though not as quickly as the white students
- Over the years she got more traditional and her Black students improved, but not to her satisfaction

Ms. Delpit at graduate school 1979-1984

- She learned the 80s latest research-based and field-tested “holistic” teaching techniques
- Writing “process approach” to literacy
 - Integrated writing and reading
 - Focusing on meaning rather than form
 - Fluency and creative expression, not correctness
- Focusing on skills would stifle students’ writing

Holistic reading approaches said:

- Before they could be expected to learn conventional standards children had to learn to first
 - ☐ be fluent in their home language
 - ☐ feel comfortable putting pen to paper
- Typical “progressive” assertion:
 - ☐ “Let me help you find your voice. I promise not to criticize one note as you search for your own song”



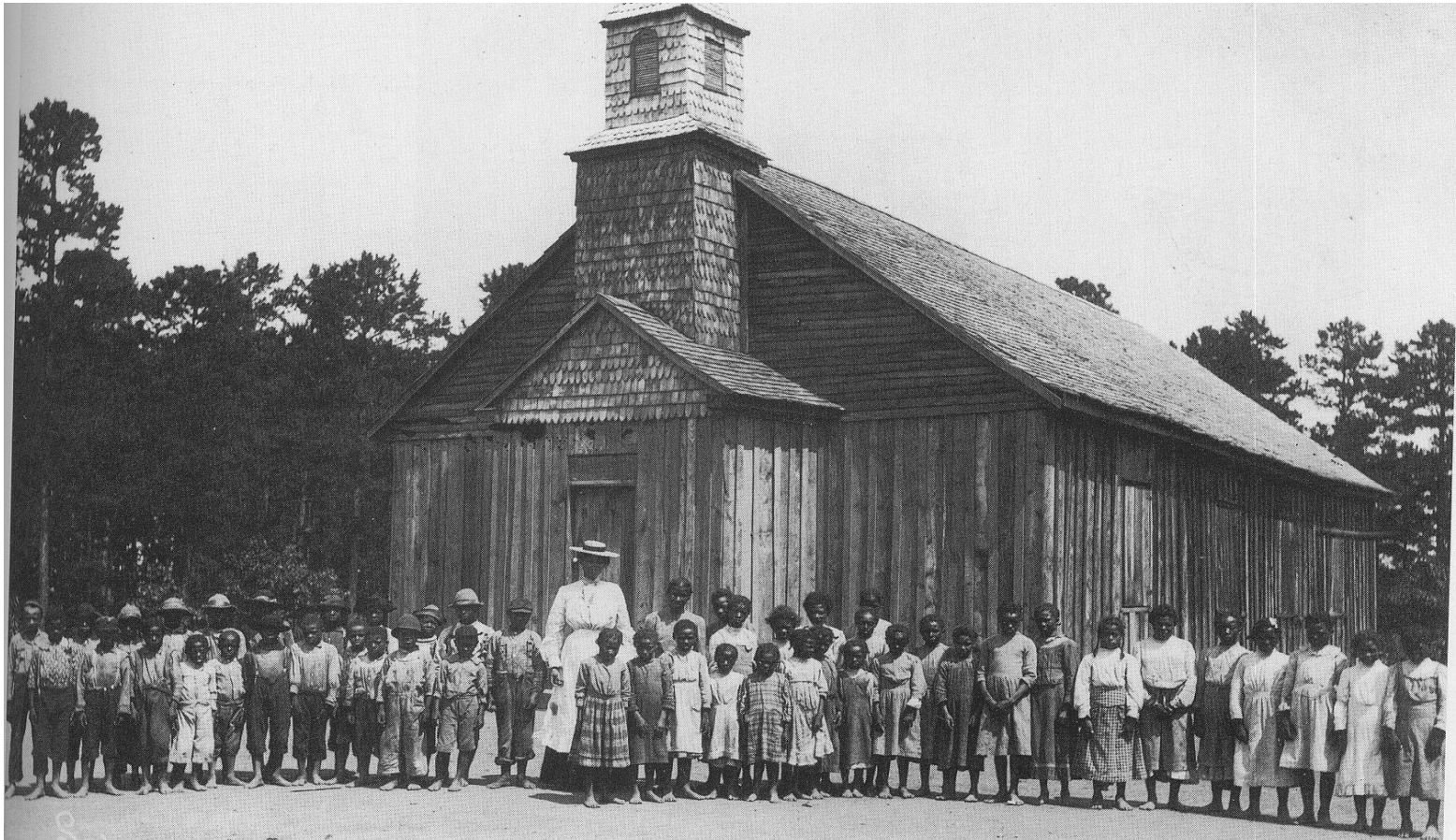
Hey, Black kids don't lack no fluency!

- Blacks students are fluent, are expressive, are creative both verbally and in writing i.e. poetry, flowing, the dozens, jone-ing'...
- Black teacher: "I've heard your song loud and clear. Now, I want to teach you to harmonize with the rest of the world"
- They need skills: oral/written forms used by the mainstream are needed for survival

Another racist plot?

- Were progressive ideas just another racist plot to keep blacks out of the mainstream?
 - Open classrooms with too much freedom
 - Children, not teachers, in control of their own learning
 - Waiting for children to read when they're ready
 - Holistic processes emphasizing expression and not correctness
 - Never getting around to teaching Black students the basics of communication
- Thus, was it her responsibility to teach the skills Blacks did not get at home or in these “unstructured” progressive environments?

Maybe so! Consider: U.S. History of mis-education, racism, tracking, culture/IQ bias



■ Country school, Athens, GA 1870s

Chiricahua Apaches Carlisle, PA Indian Industrial School



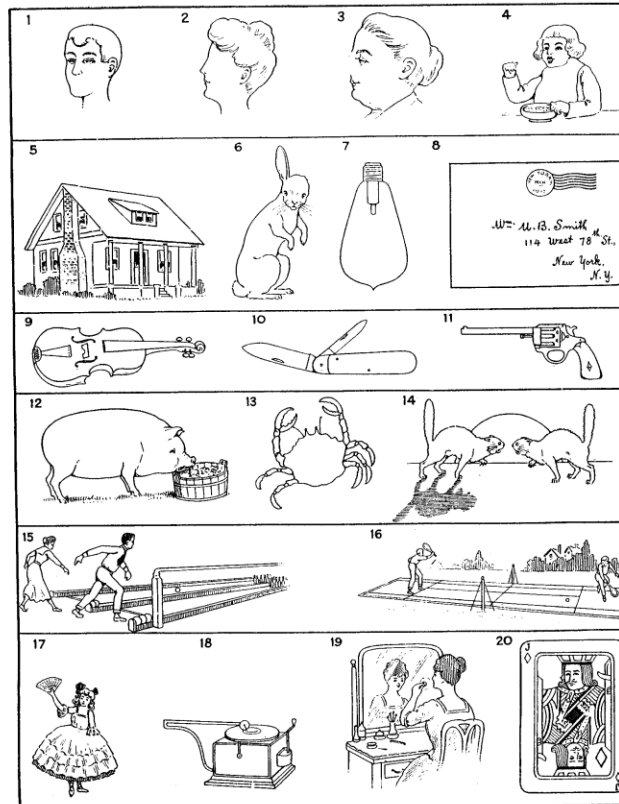
Early 1900s Science of School Management: Tracking as the Cult of Efficiency

- Tracking was an efficient way to sort the growing number and variety of students
- One-size-fits-all of a common classical curriculum was replaced by an array of education paths
- School was a way of getting a job, not becoming a wise person or a consumer of literature

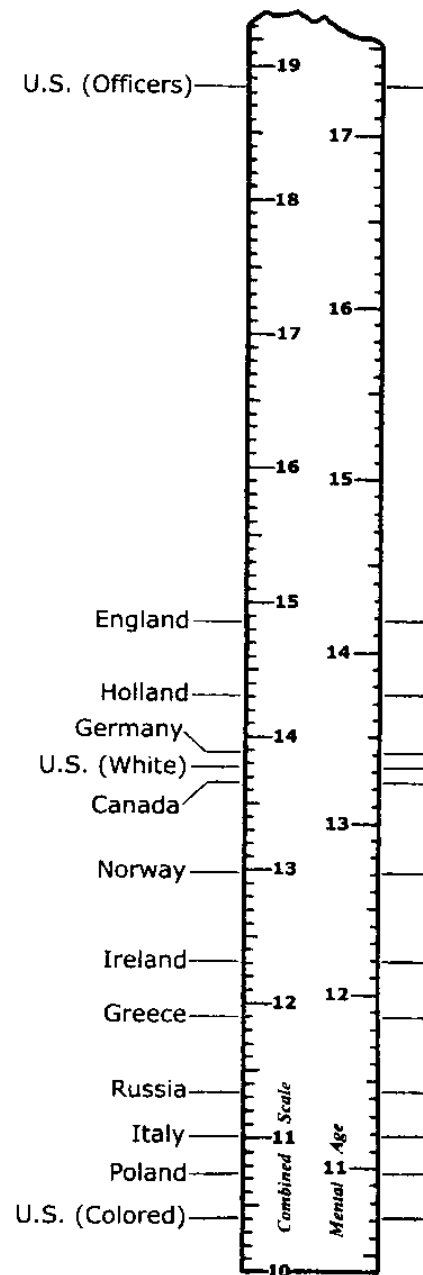


Ellwood P. Cubberley Dean D.O.E. Stanford University 1917-33
Trained administrators in the “science” of school management

“Complete the Picture” WW I Army Beta IQ Test



■ Mental Ages of racial and ethnic groups based on I.Q.



Dr. Delpit asserts: “Skills, not expression”

- Skills defined:

- *Useful and usable knowledge which contributes to a student's ability to communicate effectively in standard, generally acceptable literary forms*

- Minorities can't affect the change which allows them to truly progress without the skills which enabling a critique of the status quo in the mainstream's own terms and worldview

Delpit's suggestions

- Understand the variety of meanings available for any human interaction, and not assume that the voices of the majority speak for all
- Look at progressive elements in education
 - Is there minority involvement and support?
 - If not, why?
- Reassess what we are doing in public schools and universities to included other voices, other experiences
- Seek the diversity in our educational movements that we talk about seeing in our classrooms

Delpit's issues

- White progressives must realize that although they believe in their ideas, and that they work for many, there is another voice, another reality
- This narrowness leaves Black “progressive” educators out since White peers do not listen--hear the voice of blacks who want to be involved in the creation of progressive initiatives
- Thus minority teachers retreat from progressive settings and meetings

Critique of progressive education

- “The open-classroom movement despite its progressive intentions, faded largely because it was unable to come to terms with the concerns of poor and minority communities. I hope that those who advocate other potentially important programs will do a better job.”

-- Lisa Delpit

Essay 2 The silenced dialogue: How to succeed in the white man's world

- Delpit critiqued progressive tenets, supported direct instruction, and implied racism in her essays
 - The reactions of her White peers were volatile:
 - Black teachers weren't happy: She was just trying to stir up trouble where none existed
 - She had joined far right with her critique of the progressive agenda
 - When some (professors, education students, teachers) supported her critique, they were silenced
 - She is demanding children of color give up what/who they are to become something/someone else

How seeking to empower disempowers

- Progressives tend to **not** want to teach mainstream English (an alien discourse to minorities) because this would be/could be an instrument in furthering their oppression. It is racist and classist to demand one put aside their home language.
- Popular “progressive” and “child-centered” methods seem to leave some children of color unable to read/write--not acquiring the “codes of power” necessary for success in this society

Literacy as a part of a larger political entity

- Literacy is much more than reading and writing

- ☐ it's part of a larger political entity or "discourse"

- ☐ an *identity kit* made up of ways of:

- saying -- writing -- doing
 - being -- valuing -- believing

i.e. the discourse of lawyers, academics, or males

Types of discourse

- Primary discourses are learned at home
- Secondary are attached to institutions or groups outside the home
- All discourses are not equal in status
 - some are more socially dominate
 - carrying with them
 - social power
 - access to economic success



A culture must be transferred

- Both middle class white and working class black homes teach (a) culture to the children
 - The middle class families transfer their culture, the culture of power (book smarts)
 - Black children must learn a different culture at home, one needed to survive in their community (street smarts)

The “politics” of language skills


- Status is maintain because dominate groups in a society apply frequent “tests” of fluency in the dominate discourses, often focused on its most superficial aspects or **skills**
 - *Grammar*
 - *Style*
 - *Mechanics*
- ...so as to exclude from full participation those who are not born to positions of power



There is a culture of power

1. *Issues of this culture are enacted in the classroom:*


- Power of teacher over student
- Concepts of intelligence
- Textbooks/curriculum which determine the view of the world presented
- Compulsorily schooling
- This “culture” determines career potential, thus economic status, thus power status



There are *codes* or rules for participating in the culture of power

2. *Codes/rules around concepts relating to:*


- Linguistic forms
- Communicative strategies
- Presentation of self around ways of
 - ☐ talking
 - ☐ writing
 - ☐ dressing
 - ☐ interacting



The rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power

3. *Due to the culture of those who have power,*


- the culture of the school is based on the culture of the upper and middle classes
- certain children do well in school because they are a part of the culture of power
- certain children do perfectly well in their culture, but not in the school's culture that carries the codes or rules of power



Being told *explicitly* the rules of the culture of power make acquiring power easier

4. *Members of any culture transmit knowledge implicitly to co-members*

- When *implicit* codes are attempted across cultures, communication can break down
- When learning the ways of another culture where we may visit or live, it is better if one is *told directly* such matters of dress, interactional styles, embedded meanings, taboo words, or actions



Those with power are frequently least aware of its existence, while those with less power are most aware

5. *Liberal or radicals have a hard time admitting participation in the culture of power. It is distinctly uncomfortable.*



Liberal defined:

- Those whose beliefs include striving for a society based on maximum individual freedom and autonomy

One issue with liberals: Learning to read at grade level by the end of the 3rd grade

- The progressive idea of letting children learn to read when they're ready scares many Blacks
- The idea that Black children are reading at grade level by the end of the 3rd grade is a political necessity for Blacks
- So, how do progressives view this 3rd grade benchmark?
 - "This is so anachronistic"
 - "No more than sanctioned bullying"
 - "Reeks of anti-democratic principles including a culturally illiterate approach to learning"



Typical liberal statement 1

“I want the same thing for everyone else’s child as I want for mine.”

- Many liberal educators hold that the primary goal of education is to become autonomous, to develop fully who we are in the classroom setting without arbitrary, outside standards forced on us



Delpit critiques statement 1

- This is a reasonable goal for people whose children are already participants in the culture of power, who have already internalized its codes and bring this “cultural capital” to school ensuring their success
- Blacks want to ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that allow them to succeed in the “white man’s” larger society



Typical liberal statement 2

“Child-centered, whole language, and process approaches are needed in order to allow a democratic state of free, autonomous, empowered adults, and research has shown that children learn best through these methods.”

Delpit critiques statement 2

- For over 2 centuries, if any groups have, Blacks have invested in an ethos of a *democratic state of free, autonomous, empowered adults*
- Little proof for tenets of “process approach” work best for a literacy (or particularly with children of color) needed to create and maintain this ethos for all Americans
- Blacks can’t trust “research” as a rationale for action concerning them
 - IQ tests
 - Scientific support for eugenics/Eugenics laws

Typical liberal statement 3

“I view a display of power or authority, or exhibiting one’s personal power as an expert source as disempowering students.”

- Thus, liberals act under the assumption that to make any rules or expectations explicit is to act against liberal principles and thus the limit freedom and autonomy of students.

Delpit critiques statement 3

- Teachers can't be the only expert in the classroom
 - Indeed students have expertise in their culture
 - both teacher and student are experts in what they know best
 - Thus, to deny the expertise of students is to disempower them
- Yet teachers can share expertise while respecting students
 - Some students can feel “cheated” because teachers do not share what they know; thus the statement, “He/She didn’t teach us anything.”

Typical liberal statement 4

- *“It’s really a shame but she (that Black teacher upstairs) seems to be so authoritarian, so focused on skills and so teacher directed. Those poor kids never seem to be allowed to really express their creativity. (And she even yells at them.)”*
- This difference in perspectives is due to culturally influenced oral interactions

Culturally influenced oral interactions

Authoritarian or non-authoritarian: What children come to school able to understand

☐ **Indirect commands**

“Is this where the scissors belong?”

“You want to do your best work today.”

“Montgomery, would you like to take your bath now?”

(Though couched in a question, we know it's a directive)

☐ **Direct commands**

“Put those scissors on that shelf”

“Put your name on the papers and make sure you get the right answers for each question”

“Boy, get your rusty behind in that bathtub”



Implied outcomes

- Working class mothers use more directives to their children than middle-class. Consequently, their children may not understand the indirect commands for adherence to an unstated set of rules
- Issue: If veiled (indirect) commands are ignored, the child may be labeled a behavior problem or classified as behavior disordered

Black views of power and authority

- Black children expect an authority figure to act with authority
 - When teachers act like “chums” the message is sent that this adult has no authority and children act accordingly.
- Authority is earned by personal efforts and exhibited by personal characteristics
 - The “authoritative” person gets to be a teacher because they are authoritative. Thus teachers must consistently prove the characteristics that give them authority.
- Some students are *proud* of their teacher’s “meanness”
 - “She pushed us to know. She made us learn. She was in charge of the class and didn’t let anyone run her. Her class was fun, but she was mean.”

White middle class views of power/authority

- “Authority” is invested in the role itself
 - Expects one to achieve authority by acquisition of an authoritative role: *the teacher is authoritative because she is a teacher*
 - Does not have to express any sense of personal power (anything she does or says) because her power comes from her position
 - So from her view of authority, she expects students to obey no matter how indirect, soft spoken, or unassuming she may be
 - Consequently, urban children may see her as weak, ineffectual, and incapable of taking on the role of being the teacher—thus, no need to obey directives



Dr. Delpit's axioms

- I believe each group has a right to maintain its own language style
- To believe to act as if power does not exist is to perpetuate the status quo
- To imply that it doesn't matter how you talk or how you write is to ensure ultimate failure
- Liberation of poor students and linguistic minorities starts with accepting their culture and language and helping them to build on it

Proposed resolution for skills/process issue

- The debate/dichotomy is false
 - created by science's need to categorize
- People who work well with urban children use both:
 - help student establish own voice
 - make sure voice can be heard by larger society
- The real debate is
 - how to communicate across cultures
 - the fundamentals of power
 - whose voice gets heard in determining what's best for poor and children of color



Delpit's challenge to other progressives

- “Both sides must be listened to, and I contend that it is those with the most power, those in the majority, who must take the greater responsibility for initiating the process.”



“A collaboration that will be the most powerful yet in education”

- Dr. Delpit believes we teachers are in a unique position to:
 - put all issues on the table and dialogue by each seeking those perspectives that may differ most from theirs
 - understand one's own power (or assumed privilege due to being from the majority)
 - by not being afraid to raise questions about discrimination and voicelessness with people of color and to listen to (not hear) what they say
- This will help all teachers and all children.

Dr. Delpit and AERO have in common:

- Drugs for ADHD/ADD: She/others, if shown otherwise, will denounce drugging children
- She/others, if shown otherwise, will want to provide free school atmosphere for particular families/students
- Need for democratic habits of mind (as is knowledge of codes of power) for success in mainstream
- No one best way to teach and learn (Delpit, p. 132)
- How to use a variety of sound progressive methods in teaching reading

What else Dr. Delpit and AERO have in common

- Know students lives outside of school so as to recognize strengths and respect home culture
- Necessity of critiquing traditional schools: politics, curriculum, and methods, modes of assessment, definitions of intelligence
- “AERO” educators (like Black educators) tend to uses/promote internal sources of knowledge reflecting on their own experiences and own ability to asses and create ideas (Delpit, p. 117)
- Influencing many gatekeepers to open their doors, pushing for a variety of codes

A challenge to Delpit's world view: The promise of global youth culture

■ Global youth culture

- Post-modernism
- Internet culture
- Hip hop culture as an alternative to the mainstream
- Self-actualization not assimilation
 - Identity is not longer just racial
- Media literacy
 - Challenge to text-centric forms of communication

Postmodernism defined



Another challenge to Delpit's world view: Education in a global era

(Suarez-Orozco, 2005)

Children growing up today are more likely than in any other generation to face a life of working, networking, loving, and living with others from various national, linguistic, religious, and racial background.

The Tensta classroom (a multi-class/multi-national student school in Sweden) is a microcosm of tomorrow. Students are challenged to engage and work through competing and contrasting cultural models and social practices, adjusting to and accommodating differences in such areas as kinship, gender, language, and the complicated interrelationship of race, ethnicity, and inequality. Trans-cultural communication, understanding, empathy, collaboration are no longer ideals.

It is not as simple as the one-way assimilation accommodation of ethnic, racial, linguistic, and religious minorities learning the codes of the majority society in order to get along and get ahead

Summary of Delpit's concerns

- Can't ignore importance of both process/skills
- Blacks left out of the process of creating progressive education i.e. literacy instruction
 - Complaint: Child-centered and holistic approach are excuses for not teaching any skills, setting up for minorities for failure
- Black educators not at AERO because as they wanted their voice heard, they were silenced, turned off, ignored by progressives
- Delpit seeks to re-establish her own place in progressive education arena so she can critique progressive ideas such as the process method



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