

Appendix 1 Section Four My Educational Inquiry: My own experience of being schooled in the UK

My first experiences in the British educational system were about being different and experiencing a sense of inferiority. I developed a belief that people like myself were inferior to the White people I met and saw around me.

I went to school in this country, the United Kingdom. I have little memory of school in St. Lucia where I was born, but I do remember finding school incredibly easy when I started school in the UK. Most of the things that they wanted us to learn at the age of 6 I knew already. I was great at Math and knew more English grammar than the English children in my class. I do not know how I knew these things. I have been told about being taught in the Caribbean but I do not have any recollection of it at all – apart from an image of a Blackboard on an easel underneath the part of the house that was raised on stilts. I have vague memories of being there shaded from the sun by the bulk of our home over our heads. I do have a powerful memory that comes from the time when we were leaving St. Lucia. I remember looking up at the towering side of the ship we were going to board, to take us to England to meet my father who had travelled a year earlier, with awe and wonder as to its size.

I desperately wanted to fit in when I started school in England. I wanted to learn their language and their words. One of the earliest memories I have is of me coming home and telling my parents that we were saying ‘fart’ wrong. In our St. Lucian, African French pronunciation the word was pronounced more like ‘fàt’ than the soft drawn out “faart” of South London. It is worth remarking on the fact that my assumption was not that they had a different pronunciation than us, but that our one was ‘wrong’. Most of what I thought we did was ‘wrong’ and I struggled to get it right. For whatever reason my parents failed to instil in us any pride in ‘our’ way of doing things. We had come to England to better ourselves and that meant learning these superior ways. My father taught us how to use a knife and fork because he didn’t want us embarrassing ourselves. We did not drink out of mugs; we drank out of cups – and saucers! There we were, living in the middle of poor working class, bomb dump ridden (great places to play) Brixton, using what my father believed to be the manner and manners of successful people. I remember desperately trying to lose my St. Lucian accent and speak as the other children did. I remember once sitting behind a wall and asking a White pupil on the other side of the wall, if he could tell I was Black from the way I sounded. I wanted him to say “no”.

When I came to England I was full of life and hope. I had a sense of adventure and optimism. I believe that I was an intelligent boy. How did my sense of inferiority develop? The development of identity is a complex process that is not easily reducible to specific incidents. However, a sense of my own inferiority was undoubtedly compounded for me by having teachers that told me that people in the West Indies lived in grass huts. She even showed a picture of one to the whole class. I remember putting my hand up and saying that this was not accurate and being shut up by the teacher. I remember the feeling to this day of being made to look foolish in front of the whole class. I must have only been about seven years old at the time.

It is perhaps no wonder then that my educational progress took a gentle but dramatic slide downwards. I soon ceased being a bright boy to being safely ‘average’. The right place for

somebody who, whenever he was noticed at school, was usually being punished, usually unfairly. The White children were always right and I was usually wrong. My parents did not understand the school system and we did not have any idea, for example, of the importance of preparing for the 11+ exam. In many ways, though I grew up in this society and made good White friends, there were many of the codes and hidden meanings of being that I was unaware of. Sometimes I knew that there was something that I did not know or 'get', but more usually it was only later that I found out why I should have done X rather than Y.

I was physically strong which was useful in a tough White working class area that soon became the site for one of the most significant influxes of African Caribbean people in the UK. I remember fighting in a junior school playground war and wanting to be accepted by one of the gangs. I was the only Black boy there. I attacked the leader of the opposing gangs and was successfully winning the fight with him, only to have everybody – including members of my own gang - turn against me. I did not understand. What had I done wrong?

My secondary school experience was also marked by incidents of discrimination against myself and people who looked like me from teachers, pupils, prefects and others. My experience of schooling was probably better than that of most of my contemporaries though. Racism from the teachers, from employers and in society generally meant that life chances remained restricted for most of them, often with devastating psychological consequences. (This is not to say the experience was wholly racist. My best friend in primary school was a White boy. I had White friends throughout my secondary school experience and was taught and befriended by some exceptional teachers who I am still friends and colleagues with today. In addition to the racist treatment I received by some teachers – one of whom slammed a door in my face and sent me home with blood pouring from my mouth - I experienced many acts of kindness and demonstrations of humanity.)

During that time levels of police violence against Black people was so great that most of my contemporaries expected to be in trouble with the law. A whole generation of Black males were lost to the prison system. My friends and contemporaries had their youth blighted and their dreams destroyed. Those without criminal records often still struggled to find employment. We used to play games of 'phoning up for jobs to make sure they were still available and then turn up to get rejected because "the vacancy had been taken". We would then get one of our White friends to 'phone up about the same job only to be asked to come in for an interview. The world has changed hugely since those days, but it was awareness of these injustices that, in part, spurred me on to become a schoolteacher.

Appendix 1b Section Four: The context of schools, education and Black pupils during my education

The classic text by Bernard Coard “How the West Indian Child is made Educationally Sub-Normal in the British Educational System” was a wake up call to the Black community to stop trusting the intentions and descriptions of the schools and allied experts as to the causes of their child’s lack of achievement. So great was the extent to which the processes of education discriminated against Black children that at one time in the 1960’s over 50% of children in ESN schools in some Inner London boroughs were Black! I include an extract from an article he wrote.

What is particularly important to note is that the children of the 1960's and 1970's whom the British education system failed are the parents and grand parents of today's children -- large numbers of whom are being suspended and "excluded" from schools, or placed in "special units" or streams. For many reasons true then as now, Black boys were affected far more than Black girls. The lesson to be learned for today's problems in the school system is that they were "hatched" decades ago, in the previous two generations. When society fails one generation of children, it lays the foundations for similar, even worse failures in the generations to follow. We human beings "inherit" not only through our genes, but often also from our social circumstances.

... And let us not forget that these "excluded" youths will be the parents, one day, of children themselves. This reality tells us that if we are to make a real difference to future generations of Black children, we must start now, with the present generation, to turn things around. (Coard, 2005)

This analysis of the present ‘problems’ places it in historical context. It helps shift descriptions of the problem from biological ones to do with ‘race’ to understanding that particular communities were brutalised and are still suffering the consequences. Until there is more general acknowledgement of that context and action taken to address the specific factors existing to date determined by that context then the proportion of Black youth ‘failure’ is unlikely to decrease significantly.

By even the legitimated and valued indices and perspectives of this society there is a recognised cause for serious concern. MP Diane Abbott, in a response to an article by Michael Rosen criticising her decision to send her son to a private school wrote the following:

Ten years later (1995) Ofsted published a report on the achievements of ethnic minority pupils. It revealed that for Black boys nothing had changed since the 1970s. In London other ethnic groups (including children for whom English is a second language) are catching up with, and sometimes overtaking, White children. Black boys are the only ethnic group that continues to fall further behind. Hackney is no exception to this rule. Last year on average 42 percent of White boys achieved five good GCSEs. In Hackney only 9 percent of Black boys managed this. And it is not just a question of class. Ofsted research shows that, even if you allow for class, Black boys still underperform massively. Furthermore the majority of children excluded from London’s schools are Black boys. I could bombard you with statistics and quotations from Ofsted research. But my main point is this - for nearly 30 years the evidence has

been there about what is happening to Black children in British schools, and still people prefer to ignore the issue. On this left and right can agree. Can you understand why, Michael, faced with this, desperate Black parents are sending their children back to the Caribbean and Africa to be educated? (Abbott, 2005)

My seeking to influence the learning of social formations and individuals experiencing and concerned with education was an inquiry into how I can contribute to transformational change. It was about seeking to create better outcomes for young people of African origin in this country and a search for knowledge that enables that. In that search, developing liberating epistemology that can include and validate standards of judgement that reflect, embody and serve the interests of the communities of peoples of African descent in this country.

“The principle which must guide (Black) research must be an objective of self-knowledge and collective liberation.”

Naim Akbar 1991 quoted in G. Bravette (Bravette-Gordon, 2001)

I started from a position in which I think that youngsters of African origin experience educational challenges that are specific to them. There are differences of experience based on a variety of factors to do with the composition of the Black community in this country that has class, nationality, educational, gender and a thousand other differentiators. For example, in my experience there is a difference between children from African backgrounds whose parents or grandparents came from the Caribbean and those who come from Africa directly or whose parents do so. Second generation African children, by and large move towards similar behaviour and educational attainment as African Caribbean children. Both groups do less well than White and Asian groups (with the exception of Bangladeshi's). However, even there, the trajectory of Bangladeshi children's improvement in GCSE attainment suggests that they will eventually overtake African origin children born in this country. So there is something specific to do with the conditions in this country and the way that that interacts with African origin children, particularly those who were raised in this country. Research suggests that the same pattern exists in the United States where African Americans do less well than ethnic and national groups from most other parts of the world. I have found evidence that suggests that this also applies in Canada (Henry, 1993). This is even the case with West Indian immigrants who also tend to do better than African Americans. There are a particular set of influences and factors that negatively impact people of African origin in ways that differ from other minority groups raised in Euro/American societies.

Thirty years of government policies designed, at least ostensibly, to remedy the situation have failed to remove the gap between people of African origin in areas such as employment and education and other groups in this society. That is why I wanted to think anew and try different things and so engaged with trying to find alternatives for the education of Black children in this country. How I have been doing so is well captured in the following quote:

Appendix 2 Section Four: Why an Independent School?

Why an Independent school?

Because institutionalised racism, ignorance, fear, the composition and mentality of staff in state schools have created a situation in which the cultural, psychological, spiritual emotional and intellectual needs of Black children are not being addressed in a manner that leads to their achieving their potential.

We have a situation in which:–

- A significant number of Black children drop–out, particularly the boys
- Black children experience poor relationships with many of their teachers,
- Black children suffer high exclusion rates, many leave school with few qualifications.
- The curriculum is still colonial in many respects. It omits the positive contributions that Black people have made to the world, disrespects the pupils' Blackness and fails to address their wider needs.
- Many leave school with a negative self-image and stunted visions of what they can be and achieve.

The whole school experience on a day-to-day basis is debilitating to too many of our children. This can engender an inadequate level of attainment and negative attitudes that remain in later life.

It is not just the pupils that are affected. Many Black teachers entered the profession because they wanted to make a difference. They, too, are often frustrated by the constraints that they encounter, these include: –

- Lack of personal opportunities
- Lack of understanding of what they're doing from their White colleagues
- Fear and resentment from their White colleagues
- White teachers who are afraid of anything that they see as separating. These things are often the initiatives that Black, and some concerned White teachers, have recognised as being necessary to meet the particular needs of Black children e.g. Black mentor schemes, Black studies, supplementary classes.

Those concerned to achieve an education that meets the needs of all children are faced with a bureaucracy that changes very slowly if at all. In the present political and economic climate many of the gains that were once thought to have been achieved have been eroded and, in some instances, reversed.

There has been a failure of the state to provide an education that stimulates, supports and motivates Black children to achieve their potential. This has had a tremendous effect on the life chances of individual children; on their parents and on the Black community as a whole. If anything the situation is deteriorating. There is an urgent need to take action that can break the pattern we are caught up in.

It is felt that only by breaking away from the restrictions of state control can we create the type of institution that can make a significant contribution to meeting the needs of Black children. If the education system will not listen to, respect and respond appropriately to those needs, then we have a responsibility to ourselves to do it for ourselves.

It seems apparent to us that an independent secondary school is the only way to get around the restrictions of state education, particularly as they are expressed in:–

- * Who is employed in the school
- * The priorities of the curriculum
- * The composition of the staff group
- * Notions of the kind of adult that a particular approach will develop
- * The amount of real parent participation
- * The cultural assumptions and sensitivities of the school
- * Approaches to addressing the needs of the Black child growing up in a racist society.

Our school will explicitly address the needs of Black children by creating an environment which addresses our children's cultural, spiritual and academic needs; an environment that will provide love, support and encouragement to achieve. In doing so we hope to develop able, self confident, aware, young Black adults. Young people who are much more capable of exercising control over their lives, contribute positively to society in general and have a positive effect on the life of the Black community.

Appendix 2a. Section Four: Why new Education Initiatives.

NEW EDUCATION INITIATIVES exists in response to the inadequate and destructive experience that too many young Black people are receiving in the traditional school system, with all its consequent effects on the Black community as a whole.

We exist to support and initiate actions that will lead to the development of viable educational alternatives for Black young people. Our major project is the creation of a Black (African Centred) secondary age independent school.

What makes this school different from the other choices available is its combining of the following: -

1. High quality academic education that covers the national curriculum and extra - curricula activities.
2. A focus on the personal development of confident, well adapted adults of the future.
3. A school that is fully resourced with highly trained teachers and all the necessary range of modern equipment, technology and materials.
4. An education that affirms the identity of pupils; fosters pride; expects success and encourages excellence.
5. We have a commitment to pursuing the highest standards of excellence in all areas of our work and to modelling of what we preach. The school is owned and managed by Black people and all teachers and staff are Black.
6. An environment, in which the pupils will feel loved, supported and respected at the same time as being expected to achieve the highest standards of performance and behaviour.

In our business plan we said:

... The project is the creation of an educational centre of excellence that can meet those needs of Black pupils that present provision is failing to do. The intention is to

- start a secondary school that can demonstrate that, given the right conditions, Black pupils can achieve and excel in education, in this society.
- provide a source of inspiration for pupils and teachers in other schools and educational establishments.
- make the materials, learning and resources generated available to educationists generally to assist them in reversing the failure of schools to meet the needs of Black pupils.

Eden Charles, Oveta McInnis 1996

Appendix 2b. Section Four: Teachers seeing Black boys as a threat

Derrick

So that kind of issue with the boys underachieving as the school sees it, and not really passing exams to the level that they ought to be. One issue, which is a fact, is that they actually went around - not in a real aggressive manner - but in a sense they were not really relating to the school, so in a sense they basically stood around, laughed a lot, ran about a bit, whatever, but didn't go quietly to class and study, and when they were in class they wanted to talk. So that was the problem with the boys. It's outside perception of fear, because I always remember parents coming in and me going along the corridor and saying "move along Jamal, or Steve, Desmond" whatever, and the kids moving. It was like "How did you do that? because they're so big!" Their own son was quite tall, these people, but it was like "Oh they're so huge, how do you control them". So brand new teachers coming in, and you can actually see it, that they are thinking and they actually ask questions like "I don't know how far to go to tell somebody to do something".

Eden

Are they any different from the White boys?

Derrick

No, they are not, but the perception is that these Black kids are huge. I always remember that there was a fight, between the two biggest kids in my year, which was unusual because there were not many fights there. And this White boy was like a building worker he was big for his age and mature, he looked about twenty five. The Black boy he was fighting was tall, but he was slim. One of the teachers - he was young, he was like a trainee teacher - all he kept talking about was "Oh you have got to stop them, the size of so and so" he was talking about the Black kid. I wasn't particularly bothered about him; it was the other guy, who was working in a metal yard. He'd left school early, and I was thinking, if this guy sent a punch I would have been out, ... you know. It's just the perception that the (Black) boys are seen as being aggressive and big, frightening.

Strategic Conversation with Derrick and Eden 31.5.99

Appendix 3. Section Four: What would make a difference

The needs that the school will address

The purpose of this document is to explain how the school we are in the process of setting up proposes to meet the needs of Black pupils that the education system is presently failing to address adequately.

We have drawn from published research and our own experience as educators and parents to identify the issues and factors that are most significant in the mis-education of Black children. It is important to stress that we are dealing with well-documented issues. With this initiative we intend to break away from stereotypes and negativity and give hope to parents and an excellent education to our pupils.

Below we detail the major issues concerning young Black people in education.

- 1 Under performance of Black pupils
- 2 Alienation of pupils from school environment:
- 3 Traditional curricula that de-values pupils leading to lack of self confidence.
- 4 Alienation from the community
- 5 Low teacher expectation of pupils
- 6 Alienation from the school of parents
- 7 Discriminatory selection criteria
- 8 Lack of information about other career possibilities
- 9 Lack of relevance of much of the curriculum
- 10** The specific failure of schools to address the social and educational needs of Black males.

In putting forward our proposals we have again drawn on the work of respected professionals and activists in the field. It is because of the depth of our research that we believe that what we propose will have a major impact on the life chances of our pupils.

Here, we address each of the above points and detail what we will do that is different enough to make a difference.

1 Under performance of Black pupils

This will be addressed by:

- Pupils will be viewed and treated as people who deserve respect. All members of the school community will be treated as equals. The needs and feelings of pupils are as important as those of any other members of the school community.
- Pupils will be made aware from the outset that there is an expectation of success. This will be emphasised and will be monitored by; regular assessment of pupils work; rewarding success and setting high standards. They will be introduced to/ exposed to examples of successful Black role models, (success will be defined as achievement of potential in any given area. Therefore the people we will expose them to will reflect that).
- Mentoring schemes will be set up to offer increased support and guidance to students.

- Focussed support structures will be established. All pupils will be in small tutored groups that meet every morning, this will be a place for dealing with pastoral matters such as, confidence building, moral education and interpersonal issues, the kind of area traditionally addressed by Personal and Social Education ...
- Rewards systems will be put in place that values their achievements e.g. commendations, certificates, prizes etc.
- Learning contracts between parents, pupils and teachers and other class members. Pupils will set goals and targets for themselves, in partnership with parents, peers and the school. This will enable them to take responsibility for their learning and assist in them developing into well rounded, mature responsible adults, who are able to take responsibility for themselves.
- Monitoring systems to pick up success and underachievement before it becomes a problem; increasing responsibility for their progress.

2 Alienation from the school environment:

We will aim to create a school environment in which the pupils will feel valued and comfortable. We will do so through:

- The physical environment of the school; the displays, the foyer/ reception. Classrooms will be clean and welcoming and pupils' will be encouraged to take pride in their environment. The decoration and displays will reflect positive images and encourage pride and achievement.
- A caring and sensitive approach to pupils by all who work for the school.
- Involvement of parents; parents will be partners who are welcomed and valued in the school's activities.
- The culture of the school must develop in a way that includes and values the culture of the children and their social and cultural backgrounds.

3 Traditional curricula that de-values pupils leading to lack of self-confidence.

Most Black pupils have to contend with a lack of positive role models and imagery. In our school, the curriculum will be structured in a way that integrates the national curriculum into a holistic approach that is informed by the needs of the pupils in the wider society. This will include providing evidence, experience and examples of positive role models and images.

Relevance of the curriculum: In order to make the curriculum most relevant to the needs and aspirations of pupils and parents, our approach values diversity and draws on culturally relevant experiences, examples and models.

We recognise that how a thing is taught is as important to learning as what is taught. In order to create an educational experience that meets the needs of as many pupils as possible, we will be employing a range of teaching and learning styles. We will be targeting teaching to pupils preferred learning styles, whilst assisting pupils develop their ability to take responsibility for their learning.

The Personal and Social Curriculum will address a range of issues that are pertinent to the all round, healthy development of young people into mature responsible adults. Amongst these important issues are the effects of the promoting as "Black Culture" a criminal,

violent and abusive approach to others.

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It will address these issue through topics such as: -

- African history and an integration of the contribution made by Black people into all aspects of the schools curriculum and practice
- African cosmology
- Preparation for adulthood training; capability, responsibility and independence
- Parenting training
- Relationships training; building good relationships
- Confidence building
- Community skills and participation. This will value the positive features of the child's world/background and stress the importance of giving and participation in activities that build community as a way of learning about community. It will also be a means through which pupils practise and acquire the skills of operating effectively in the school and wider community.
- Positive approach to self and life - positive thinking
- Positive role models through teachers, subject information and community models participating in school activities

4 Alienation from the community

Refer to 1 above

- Recent years have witnessed the growth of an individualist culture that is anti-community; this has the effect of moving many young Black people outside of their natural sources of support with devastating results for them and for society as a whole. We will address this by;
- Teaching community skills and participation. This will value the positive features of the child's world/background and stress the importance of giving and participation in activities that build community as a way of learning about community. It will also be a means through which pupils practise and acquire the skills of operating effectively in the wider community.

5 Low teacher expectation of pupils

See 1 above plus:

- Staff Training that raises awareness of internalised racism
- The promoting of an ethos of success and achievement, such that pupils will know that they are expected to excel and achieve.

6 Alienation from the school of parents

This will be addressed by:

- Learning contracts between parents, pupils and the school. Each contract geared towards the specific needs of the pupil as agreed in three-way discussion. (How about with fellow pupils as well)?
- The school will be in a partnership with parents that is about mutual support and growth. The participation of parents in:-
 - Assisting in the management of aspects of the school
 - organising events,
 - raising funds
 - Supporting the learning of their children outside of school time

- Contributing to and participating in classroom activities
- Use the school as a learning environment for themselves
- Participation in educating the school

7 Discriminatory selection criteria

Most schools in the independent sector and, increasingly in schools that have ‘opted out’, have selection criteria that reflect the social class and economic backgrounds of the pupils’ parents. This, typically, discriminates against sections of the community. This has a significant impact on Black pupils many of whom are excluded because of their colour, culture and class background.

We think that it is essential that, in creating a school that is different to the present inappropriate provision, we have criteria that are inclusive of the differences that exist within the Black community. To this end we are committed to ensuring that the school recruits from the fullest range that exists within the Black community. This is likely to have funding/financial implications and is one of the reasons why will put considerable energy into raising funds to support the cost of an education in the school.

It is for this and other reasons that we propose to include within our selection criteria the commitment of parents to actively participating in the education of their children and school life. Implicit in our definition of a Learning Contract, discussed elsewhere, is the notion of the ‘Learning Family’ as an important part of community development. We want to support and ensure that parents understand that they retain responsibility for the education of their children whilst they are being educated. Their participation in the school is crucial to their child’s success.

This would involve setting up processes that acknowledge the skills that parents have and include a commitment to participating in the schools’ mission as part of the selection process.

We envisage encouraging parents to contribute their knowledge and skills to the process of their child's education as apart of a “Learning Community” that includes parent, school, pupils and other learners in the school. We will also encourage and support parents to engage in their own learning and development as one of the best ways of supporting their children's’ growth.

8 Lack of information about other career possibilities

This is often linked with the channelling of Black young people into a narrow range of career options e.g. sporting as opposed to academic or professional directions.

This will be addressed by pupils mixing with adults from a wide range of careers, exposure to information about the widest possible number of career possibilities. We will ensure that these include those that Black pupils do not normally associate Black people. There will be continuous information to pupils and parents and a well structured career education programme

9 Lack of relevance of much of the curriculum

The lack of relevance of much of the curricula to the spiritual, personal, social and

economic needs of the pupils will be addressed by:

- The curriculum will be structured in a way that integrates the national curriculum into a holistic approach that is informed by the needs of the pupil in the wider society.
- So for example food technology will be taught in a manner that links it with community, identity, gender role, spirituality and independent living competence. Particularly for male students but also of great significance for female students is the breaking down of stereotypes about social and personal roles within the “family”, whichever notion of that word we choose to work with, and within society as a whole.
- It is also critical to developing an understanding and appreciation the food from a variety of cultures, including their own. It can help break down the devaluing of the traditional foods that often happens in the present school structure. By valuing important cultural symbols like food it is hoped to increase the relevance of the curriculum to the pupils and maintain and inspire their commitment to their learning. For these reasons, subjects like food technology, will be compulsory for all pupils.

10 The specific failure of schools to address the social and educational needs of Black males.

Many schools seem to set themselves up in direct conflict with Black males. They have to contend with a range of negative stereotypes that result in a self-fulfilling prophecy.

This will be addressed by:

- The involvement of Black male teachers and significant members of the community in their social and academic development.
- A curriculum that includes activities and focus designed to engage Black males
- A systematic process that offers other models of male behaviour, encouraging responsibility and pride in self.

Appendix 4. Section Four:

New Education Initiatives/Pyramid Academy: Who are we?

NEI is a group of people who are seeking to create Pyramid Academy, an educational centre of excellence that can fundamentally increase the life chances of children of African heritage. It is based on Osiron philosophy, developed from Universal African thought.

Our approach is based on research and experience, in Britain, the Caribbean, Africa and the USA. It is a fusing of a variety of approaches that have proven to be successful in meeting the educational needs of pupils of African heritage. It has 5 directors and 3 executive members.

What is PA offering?

(What makes our school different)

- An expectation of success supported by carefully thought through, (expertly designed) processes to help make that happen.
- An Academy culture that affirms the identity and culture of the child of African heritage.
- The active participation in the life of the school of significant role models
- An approach to education that is designed to meet the specific needs of the child of African heritage.
- The integration of African perspectives and contributions in all aspects of the schools' life
- A focus on developing the whole child as well as a concentration on achieving the academic qualifications that they will need to operate effectively in adult life.
- Respect for and integration of the parents and family within the Academy community.
- Highly qualified and motivated teachers that are passionate in their commitment to achieving excellence in their work with pupils and family.
- The spiritual development of the child seen as being fundamental to their overall development.
- Love and respect, encouragement and support, challenge and stimulation, discipline and order.
- High quality resources at an affordable price, flexibly allocated to help ensure that each child's individual needs are met.
- An education that focuses in developing proud, self confident, self aware, highly qualified, socially balanced adults.
- An institution that addresses the issues that are of greatest relevance to the growth and development of the African heritage community in this country.

Who is it for?

Children of 10 and 11 years of age whose parents value this approach to education and are prepared to pay the fees or are eligible for bursaries or grants.

(Those who want to participate in the building of independent African institutions that can contribute to the development of the African community as a whole.)

Things that we can base our educational strategy that have been “Proven” to work by research.

Children perform better when the educational experience is congruent with their own culture.

- Affirmation and valuing of African culture
- African philosophy integrated throughout the curriculum, the structure, and the processes of the school
- African innovations and contributions integrated to all of the areas studied.
- The education process will be holistic in its philosophy, structure and processes in order to reflect the holism of African culture. So for example music might be incorporated into a lesson that is about science or mathematics. Spirituality into the study of history, drama or geography

Children of African origin have been shown to perform better when there are role models and significant members of their own community present within the educational process.

- Mentor schemes have been shown to have a real affect on performance. Our model will be even more integrated than the traditional type of scheme which is a “add on” to the school rather than integral to its process
- People who have made good contributions to society from within the community will be brought into the Academy to work with and alongside the pupils
- The examples that we will use will include “ordinary” as well as “extraordinary” members of the African descent community. E.g. Mothers and fathers who have made great sacrifices and/ or contributions to their families and or communities.

Children perform better, become more self-confident and have a higher sense of self worth when they feel safe, feel valued and nurtured.

- Love and valuing of the pupils, for who they are, will be openly expressed. e.g. models and standards of beauty will reflect form and African sensibility rather than the dominant European one which causes so much self hate amongst Black pupils.
- A culture of respect for all members of the Academy will be deliberately and consistently reinforced
- We will focus on pupils’ strengths, as a way of addressing their learning needs.
- We will create a culture in which humour is not dominated by ‘putdowns’ of each other.

Children perform better when they are expected to succeed. Plenty of evidence available that demonstrates that teachers have stereotyped expectations of pupils of African heritage.

- A constant emphasising of the fact that the pupils are expected to attain the highest standards of behaviour, thinking and knowledge.
- A constant reinforcing of the heights that people of African heritage have achieved historically.

When children can see purpose to their endeavours and can relate it to the realities that they experience they can engage in a more holistic manner. They can bring themselves to it because they are not separated from the process of creating their own lives. This is supported by, amongst others, the work of

Paulo Friere

- The pupils will actively engage in activities that contribute to the development of their community.

Appendix 5. Section Four: My log 1998. On creating the Sankofa Learning Centre

So I had this group of people together and we have been working on starting a school, and I found that nothing has changed in fact, in so many ways. They are absolutely beautiful people that I am working with, but they all have lives, they all have children, or they have financial crisis, or have busy careers, or there is one person who is not prepared to put in a lot more than anyone else. If they are not working hard she sees no reason why she should. So basically I end up doing 95% of all the work. I find it a frustrating experience. I have tried a variety of ways of changing it. I have tried being as democratic as possible to the point where some people have complained to me that I am not showing enough leadership. I have tried being very directive and the group gets galvanised for a while and then it almost goes back to its default mode of being.

The reflex of the group seemed to me to be to do things ‘professionally. “We can’t do this before we get 3 or 4 quotes”. I have nothing against getting 3 or 4 quotes if other people are going to get involved, get the quotes and get the quotes in by a set time. What happens of course is that it takes aeons to get the quotes in and the original idea that we were raising money for is no longer possible. That is my frustration with working with a group.

Also my son started having difficulties at school that I found really depressing. He went to school as a very bright young man. He went to one of the best private schools in London. I did not want to send him to a private school but I felt that I had no choice given the quality of the state schools around South London where I live. I live in Inner City London in the Borough of Lambeth and I could not find a decent school, not what I consider a decent school for him. So I sent him to this school in Croydon. I hoped just for a couple of years. He had been starting to lose his work discipline and he was no longer coming regularly on top of his class. In fact it was a downward spiral and I found it hard to understand why. So I put him in this private school and he started at school as the most clumsy of children yet a bright child, who easily passed his entrance exam. Within a very short time he changed and became a star school athlete and virtually a dunce, that's putting it too strongly but according to the opinions of the teachers he was just not performing anything like they would have expected him to perform and which they require children to perform in that school to.

We went through all the different approaches to motivate him, bribery, discipline, punishment, tons of support but basically it did not make a significant difference. In conversations that I have had with him and I need to have a lot more and perhaps delve into the subject through some of this work here, he just did not want to hack himself at school too much. He had good fun at school. He loved going to school. Even the teachers who complained about him said what a lovely boy he was, how much they enjoyed having him in the class. They just loved so much about him, but he just was not pushing himself to the level that they thought that he should be, and he just did not see why he should push himself any harder because he felt that he working as hard as anybody else in the class, so what was wrong with that?

Anyway, it got more and more interesting. His mother started getting in touch with radical educational organisations like Education Otherwise and Education Now and she just got this bee in her bonnet really about this idea of educating him at home. This led to several arguments between the two of us. I agree to the principle of parents taking control of their children's education and I agree so much with the critique of existing education that the de-schoolers and the home-schoolers had. However, I felt that fundamentally it was wrong for a child to be educated on their own with just their family or parents. I felt that for a variety of reasons schools should be about helping a child grow their personality as a result of being stimulated by a variety of sources not just what the parents find. I also felt that there was great value in a child growing into adulthood with other young people. We, his parents, will not be around when he gets to be an old man. School is usually the time when children meet the people who will be their friends for life, or who will be significant in their future life. I felt that it was important that they are placed in a social situation, particularly as a young Black boy, in which they could have a lot of other Black children around him with whom he could share part of the experience of his growth into adulthood. I wanted him to have positive Black images around him. And positive support, friendships with other Black young people to help him grow well. And so what I started to do, after lots of arguments, was working with his mum on creating the idea of a learning centre which can pull together the best of the critique of schooling from the home-schoolers and provide social (African centred) education. What I have been doing is trying to work out how to make this viable, how to make it economically viable and I have some ideas on this which I can talk about later.

To get back to the other group now, my big problem has been in how to provide the sort of leadership or membership of that group that can make a difference, that can actually help this thing happen and I have tried a variety of things. I have found it so, so difficult. It has raised issues for me about my personality, about the kind of person I am. I have beliefs about democratic participation. I don't like the idea of an autocratic leader and I have been trying to strike a balance between giving a clear ideas and working things out really carefully and putting them to people enthusiastically at the same time saying "this is what you have to do". It often feels to me that when people don't have time to consider a lot of ideas carefully and to analyse them or critique them then the role of a leader should be to help people move into action without waiting for a time when after consultation, participation and reflection careful decisions can be made

That might well be possible with some of the group. Others of the group would rebel against that. My big issue is how do I make the balance between the two. How do I work with these people to create something? I have been going to meetings and trying out different things. I have tried a reflexive approach and sometimes it has been very successful and part of what I am going to do is during the course of this research that I am doing here is to experiment with different means, ask different questions to find others ways in which I can work to create the kind of organisation or kind of changes that I think are necessary in participation with other people. So I will need to be exploring different ways of participation maybe.

Appendix 6. Section Four: My log on first day of Sankofa Learning Centre

Today is the first day of the learning centre. It is now 14.51, by my watch, which is a bit fast. I want to record my reflections on the day now so that I don't follow my usual pattern of putting it off and never doing it.

Last night we had a spiritual cleansing ceremony which seemed to involve people burning stuff in bowls and carrying smoke all around the house, clapping our fingers to chase out negative spirits, negative forces and stinking up the place basically. I was in a bad mood during the whole ceremony because the woman who was running it had arrived nearly two hours late and I was feeling anxious because there was other things to do. There was another parent who wanted a meeting because her son had some anxiety about the learning centre and by the time I got round there it was too late and there was nobody there so I couldn't have the conversation and I was angry because I thought it meant that now it wouldn't take place and because of that her son would not come to the learning centre today. Luckily today I phoned her up and it is no problem and he is going to come today, so I am feeling pretty good.

I have been trying to let go and relax a bit lately because this thing has got me really tense. I have found some interesting experiences today working in the classroom. It was fascinating how much the children still expected to be in a classroom, in a 'proper school'. They still expected some of things that pertain in school to take place. This is of course perfectly natural, given that that is what their experience is but it was still interesting and it made it difficult sometimes; it presented issues sometimes to address in terms of how to proceed.

We spent some time talking in the morning about the vision that we had for the children, the vision that we had for the learning centre, how we want them to achieve great things and I got the distinct impression that this is just boring them, they were not interested in all this stuff, and it was not that they weren't interested, they wanted to get onto the real school stuff and we had the discussions with them about their lives and about what kind of rules they want to have in the learning centre and how they want to be whilst they are here, they enjoyed the discussion but there was an air of expectation about them of "when is the real school stuff going to happen?"

I was then keen to actually get them involved in doing some writing or doing something which they recognised as school work so as to start off from where they are and through the process of working with them in a way in which they are accustomed to, to a different extent, to lead them into different ways of working. So I said to them "OK, now we are going to talk about the theme of the first two weeks, which is about identifying your resources internal and external to yourself and working on how you are going to use them to achieve what you want to achieve in your life".

But as soon as I said "resources", I asked myself, "maybe they don't understand what the word resources means". So we then got into a discussion about resources and what they are and, as we got into this discussion, about how we speak to each other and then we got into a discussion about valuing people and about what rules we need to get on with each other, so we did a quick little exercise about "the things that help me learn, the things and guidelines I need to help me learn", and that was fascinating because they had real problems writing them down and what they wrote down sounded to me like what they would expect to have been asked to write down from when they were at school. So I am looking at the books now: "Things to help me learn" Here's one pupils list.

- Listen to everything that teachers say.

- No copying from other peoples work.
- Practice (homework) responsibility
- Being loyal
- Find out what the word resources means.

Now most of that I believe is stuff that they have got from their experience of working in groups in a school type context before. The challenge for us is how can we, not rubbish all that stuff, but find empowering ways of working, ways in which they establish ways of working that are right for them.

I then remember the thinking I had had before the day started, in which I had thought on the theme of resources, that the best way to find out what your present resources are is to have some kind of knowledge of your past resources. So I spoke to them about how I got to be where I am in my life now. I told them a bit of my story about how my parents came to England, about how my father came before my mother and my whole family, about the traumas we experienced on the boat on the way over, and about different things, then I asked them to write and/or draw their story, their history. How did you get to be where you are today? And obviously we had little quips like, “by bus”, “my dad dropped me off”. But they then had to go and sit down and write and draw and what I ended up doing was sitting with them and talking with them while they did it. I soon realised that that meant that they never actually got that much work done because they were chatting. One person would say something, and then somebody else would spark off that and somebody else who would have been working would have to make another comment and somebody else who had been working would say something and so it meant that the writing or the drawing kind of work kept not happening while people spoke. And I thought that even though this is important, because I think that to talk is learning, that they might not value that themselves, and so that I needed them to leave the day with things that they valued, that they recognised as being “work” and so I said and now we are going to have some silent time and I am going to sit here while, for 20 minutes’ you work without talking, and they did. I’m finding that I am enjoying the way that I am being with this group people.

The primary teacher, who is a supply teacher, is taking the class of three children downstairs. She is a Nigerian, and has not actually had any experience of teaching in this country. She is a very nice woman; I think she must be about 30. We had concerns that people would have problems understanding her accent. We also had concerns about her authority with the children, and about how much she understood our approach to learning. I have tried to explain to her a couple of times and each time she just agreed with me and said things that ostensibly agreed with me but did not sound quite the same as what I was saying. However, she has turned out to be a competent teacher just from what I have seen today. She plays games with the children, she chats to them, so is quite friendly and approachable. She does try to be strict with them now and then but I think, interestingly enough, there is quite a nice little relationship emerging place.

Appendix 7. Section Four: Log entry – The shift in my practice

Log entry – The shift in my practice

I gradually developed a practice that was largely based on a view that these boys and girls needed to have love openly expressed to them. I would tell them wonderful things that I could see about them and they would come to me to work. I could not spend enough time in the learning centre because I was still really needed to bring in the funds, but when I was there I loved it. I found myself living an embodied theory that was much more congruent with the values I wished to live.

I transformed my behaviour in the Learning Centre with the children. It used to be an effort but now it is my first response to not shout or use put-downs as ways of getting them to stop doing something negative. I do lose my temper sometimes and raise my voice at somebody. But that is much less than I used to and what I try to do is to talk to them about it afterwards and to apologise for the shouting while still holding on to the point that their behaviour was wrong. I do not want them to see me as a ‘soft-touch’ because, apart from anything else, that would defeat my ability to influence them. They might interpret my behaviour as weakness rather than fairness. How do I do this?

I try to compliment them and seek to find as many new ways of telling them how intelligent, gifted, beautiful and able they are as I can. When they say they cannot do something I am more likely now to tell them that they are too intelligent to hold on to that position. “Lets find a way to do it”. When that does not work I try to speak with them and find out what is really going on. Maybe sometimes they see these conversations as a way out of not having to do something that they do not want to do. I don’t believe that you can force somebody to learn however. You can get compliance, but what is this teaching them? I know that in life they will have to do things that they do not want to do. Is not part of the purpose of education to prepare them for these times? I don’t think that I have seen better performance from young people who have been shouted at than I have from ones who have not been.

I believe that you can hold boundaries, administer appropriate sanctions without speaking in a way that affects the young persons’ self esteem. I believe that a critical part of what we are doing is about building self-esteem. I believe that the more the young people believe in themselves the more likely they are to attain whatever their measures for success are.

I feel that the young people we work with are subjected to tremendous pressures as adolescents independent of the pressures they face because they are Black in this society. I feel that as they explore themselves and the environment they find themselves in they will make lots of mistakes that we can see coming. Telling them that they are about to make mistakes or that they have made mistakes can often cause alienation. Not telling them can cause huge frustration as they engage in activities that will have negative consequences for themselves and others. Whatever we do, they will make mistakes, if we are there for them, in a relationship that they value, then we can help them mitigate the damage of their mistakes. We can help them learn more rapidly from their own mistakes and those of others and find ways of travelling their individual paths to their goals quicker and more safely.

It is a hard position to hold as I see my peers, friends and family extolling the need for

‘discipline’ which they interpret as telling the young person what they have done wrong and imposing punishments upon them. I too believe in discipline. I believe that children need to work to achieve rewards. I also believe that they should receive good things just because they are who they are. I believe that they should not get everything that they want and that they should have boundaries placed on what they can and can’t do.

I found forms of being in which I would demonstrate my values more than articulate them. I had observed Ian Phillips and Jack Whitehead and been impressed by the extent to which they both live values of humanity much more clearly than they, in my opinion, articulate them. Their living of these values is of enormous power and I sought to reengage with doing this more consistently myself. I would not get triggered the way that I used to because my views had changed at a deeper level. I would not shout, be cynical or get angry because I had developed a strong, integrated, embodied belief that that behaviour was entirely counter productive. I did not even have to think about avoiding it because it was no longer part of me. I sought to focus on the positives and build upon strengths and loved the results from the interactions I engaged in with the young people.

What I have found is that it is more important to be who I want to be and live according to the values that I seek to hold than to focus on preserving the centre at all costs. I have come to the conclusion that what matters is the quality of the experience that the children engage in. A building or equipment is secondary to that.

Appendix 8a. Section Four: The boys' camp – an inquiry into evolving liberatory relationships

1st Sankofa Boys' camp

Adults notes.

The boys' camp can be thought of as a form of research or knowledge generation into the questions:--

1. What does it take to inspire Black boys to break out of the stereotype models of maleness, to behave positively, aspire and achieve?
2. What do I do that makes a positive difference to the boys?
3. What am I doing that works?

Role of the adults. With each other we will: -

- Reflect on what we do with each other
- Discuss the experiences we have what they can offer other boys, fathers and Black people as a whole
- Be open to listen to new ideas from each other
- Contribute our ideas and feelings with each other

In order to make a difference to the boys an appropriate relationship/s is essential. So another question we could consider could be

4. How can I develop a relationship that is liberatory with the boys I relate to?

Role of the adults. With the boys we will: -

- Model a way of being that is cooperative amongst each other
- Work alongside the boys, share in doing the work
- Share your dreams and experiences with them
- Have fun
- Generate a safe environment
- Enable the boys to have space and climate to talk - and listen, really listened, to what they have to say believing in the value of the boys just talking.
- Affirm the boys. Seek and praise their positives. Work to give them a clear sense that they are good people who are valued by us men.
- Believe that they can achieve great things if they set their minds to it.
- Facilitate. Pull out from the boys, get them to solve problems and gain their own insights rather than telling them.
- Do the above at the same time as setting boundaries and maintaining them. Discipline will be essential in the camp. This has to be both negotiated and held.
- Telling them what you think but leaving them freedom to arrive at their own conclusions
- Respect them. No physical violence/punishment
- We can advise them but should be careful about telling them.

Resources and activities:-

- Chapter from Steven Biddulphs book
- Football, archery and other sports
- Circle work
- Adult life line sharing
- The kind of man I want to be

Appendix 8b. Section Four: The boys' camp

This is an edited part of a transcript of an interview with one of my critical friends about the boys' camp. What follows is my response to one of her questions.

Firstly, what did we want to achieve by taking the boys away? I think that we have written it down prior to going that in broad terms the objective was to help the boys growing up, they are about to take their exams so that's why we set the age at 13 and over, so many of them seemed to be having real problems focussing on their school work. But also, more critically their parents came into huge conflict or huge disagreement, just not able to communicate leading to frustration that leads to conflict. And I had thought I had noticed that this was to do with most of these children being raised by single mothers and that if the males were around it might make a difference. I also thought that it would be good, that even if their fathers were around, to have a group of men around who could provide different role models about what Black adult manhood is. For them to spend some time, in my terms, with some positive Black men so that they could have notions of to be a Black man you don't have to follow some kind of stereotype notion of what manhood is. I also wanted them to come together with each other in a situation that was Black. A Black youth/male social situation, I thought Black children would benefit from, having solid Black peers.

I wanted them to enjoy themselves together with Black males, Black adults, because I think, from some of the conversations that I have had with children, they don't have that type of relationship with their fathers anymore, because they have got to a certain age and the fathers do not seem to be able to "play with them" anymore. So those were the kind of aims that we had.

In designing it, we almost didn't design it. Basically we said we are going to go camping but they have got to organise what they want to do for themselves. That was born out of two things. One because we did not have time to organise things for them, two we thought it would be really good to get them to organise things for themselves and get them to work on the process of working together and take up issues that came out of that and use that as learning points about how they can work together, how and what choices they made, what the implications and consequences of those choices were. However, I think some of the children came with the impression that this was a holiday. In fact some other children came with the impression, they didn't know why they had come. Their mothers just sent them because their mothers felt it would be good for them. I know in two instances the relationships got so bad between the mothers and sons that the mothers hadn't told them hardly anything at all about why they were going, which caused us some issues actually, I think it meant that trust between the adult males and the younger males could have been an issue.

OK, so it meant that we got involved in trying to plan things out, and we had disaster after disaster to start off with. My first disaster was my airbed collapsing on the first night, it was the coldest night I ever experienced. I only had one thin sheet to cover me. It was awful! The night before the driver of one of the cars had said that he had locked his keys in his car and was unable to get in to it. So I promised to drive him home to pick it up at the crack of dawn. That was a mistake.

As a leader, I should have delegated this or got him to travel by public transport. It meant that, on the crucial first day, there was a vacuum. People did not know what to do and waited until I returned at almost midday before we could start the meeting to plan what we were going to do. I was tired and miserable from lack of sleep and from the long journey. It was awful. It meant that all the things that we had planned for the day couldn't happen like we planned. But again, the keys were left in the car because one of the boy who wanted to listen to music while he was supposed to be working borrowed the car keys and returned to the car, then not knowing the car keys were still in the ignition had shut the car doors.

By the time we came back and cooked and cleaned up and that meant chasing up some of the boys who were supposed to be doing things and weren't doing it it meant that we did not finish breakfast until about 2 o'clock. And depression set in, people started getting low and, I can't particularly remember what we did that afternoon. I think we maybe just played football and cooked again, which took hours and hours, and had a really late night that night, they did not want to go to sleep, which again was awful. But I got myself another bed. I was not going to put up with another cold night like that again. It rained that night, and the previous night where it had been really cold and Lloyd had tried to tighten the tent up, the material just disintegrated, so I could not feel the wind but I could see the outside at all times. It wasn't very clear at all. So we put up the spare tent, I was so proud of myself that I had brought a spare tent, good organisation, got up and put up the spare tent and the second night when the rain fell we did not get a drop of rain in our tent. The boys' tent got wet because they had all wanted to sleep together in a tent much too small for them and when they got up in the morning they found a lot of their clothes were wet.

That was a much better day though. Actually, the day before we went for a walk in the woods which they actually really enjoyed. They swung on the ropes that had been left behind in the woods and had races through the clearings. What we didn't realise was that they were getting away, sneaking away to play around the campsite when we weren't looking.

On the first night we had a meeting with the boys and we had planned out the week of activities and we told them a little bit more about what we planned to do and how we planned to work which was us working pro-actively, it was not supposed to be like a school thing but I did notice that they were so, there was a lot of resistance. They were not a group of boys who had come together who were now going to sit down quietly, plan things and then just do it. They misbehaved. There was all kinds of things they did which disappointed me so I really had to have a go at a couple of them, just comments about this being like school, which again disappointed me, but I could see why they were saying it. Because I said they were behaving like school kids, but I wasn't satisfied with my response and in some ways I have not been satisfied with my response the whole trip really. But I will get back to that. Basically its about the fact that I think that I need to work on alternative behaviours, I go to quickly to telling not facilitating not asking the good questions, or using other means of getting people to do things.

We thought we had to get this group together and get a sense of them and then see how we can work with them to think more positively about growing up as positive

Black men. It turned out working with them and the men, just being with them, we got to having conversations with them, with all these men around, we did get to understand what some of their issues were and we did get to establish relationships and come to some ideas of how best we could work with them.

What I realise is, is that we had lots of small conversations with the boys which were very powerful but they came out of incidents that arose during the day and one of the most powerful conversations came about when one of the fathers just kept shouting at this son. I have also shouted at Ife, but I shouted at Ife the same way I shouted at everybody else, by and large, I might have shouted at Ife a little bit more. The father was challenging the boy in front of everybody and I looked at him and I thought "Shit", I have done the same thing to my son before, this looks really terrible! It is not the way to handle him! As soon as the father and son disengaged I noticed that one of the men talked to the father and I also noticed that the boy was a bit distressed, I'm not sure if I saw his face but I just felt something so I went and talked to him. So much stuff came out! He talked about how his fathers got no right to talk, that his father had given him nothing, he talked about how hard his life was, he talked about what kind of father is he, how can his father tell him what he can or can't do, or how he should behave, that his father is nothing to him, I said that I'm sure his father loves him, he said he doesn't show it, he said some of the things that his father had done, some of it sounded really terrible you know. One thing had to do with the way that his father had made a promise that was never kept. As he spoke I thought about the promises that Ife has accused me of not keeping. I felt bad and resolved to make sure that that did not happen in the future.

Appendix 8. Section Four: Anonymous Poem

Teacher

*I will know you
I will touch you and hold you
and smell and taste and listen
To the noises that you make - and the words, if any.*

*I will know you
Each atom of your small, lonely, aching, raging, hurting being
will be known to me
Before I try to teach you
Before I try to teach you I must first reach you.*

*And then, when I have come to know you, intimately,
I will insist, gently, gradually, but insist that you know me
And later, that you trust me and then yourself.*

*Now, knowing each other, we will begin to know the world -
The seasons, the trees, animals, food, the other children.
The printed word, books
The knowledge of what has gone before and been recorded.*

*Then as surely as I moved toward you, I will move away.
As I once insisted on being close to you,
Demanding entrance to your half-wild world of fear and fantasy,
refusing you aloneness, so now I move away.*

*As your words come and your walk quickens,
As you laugh out loud or read clearly and with understanding,
I stand behind you - no longer close - available
But no longer vital to you.*

*And you - you grow - you are! You will become
And I, the teacher?
I turn, with pride in you towards my next child.*

Quoted in A Special Study to Show the Lifting of the Curtain To Reveal My Educational Values by Justine Hocking 1992

Appendix 9. Section Four: Conference address

“The purpose of my presentation is to suggest other ways of looking at our situation and to take action to change that situation fundamentally.

A building and its resources do not automatically equate to a good education. We have spent a long time measuring a school by the criteria that we have been given by others. The fancy equipment might even be part of the problem, detracting from developing different perceptions of the needs of the pupils and their situation.

We must see education through our own eyes and from our own needs. What do we want from an education? Our experience (at Sankofa) suggests that it is to do with the kinds of young people that emerge from the education process. Parents want children who become good people, able to build good lives for themselves and to contribute to their community and to the wider society. Though our conversations with them often start around our ability to assist them to pass their GCSE's, it soon moves on to the kinds of people that parents hope them to become.

We have a crisis in that our children are being socialised into a set of beliefs and behaviours that not only disadvantages and excludes them, it also fills them with negative and destructive notions of what it means to be a young Black male or female. We have the MTV Base culture and its propagation of nihilism, sexism, machismo, and money as God materialism, short-termism and individualism.

How do we counteract this? What can we do about it?

When we started the learning centre we believed that an African centred curriculum; i.e. teaching them their history, providing positive role models, teaching in ways that were more holistic. We thought that would make an immediate difference to the way that the children approached their learning.

It did not. It has become clear and clearer that we needed to study the power of the messages and the medium through which they are being presented. When the young people watch MTV Base they are watching highly crafted imagery; they are imbibing messages delivered with great sophistication. The messages might be crap and the images might be self-destructive but they owe their effectiveness to their quality.

I was watching the row of television monitors whilst I was on the exercise bike in the gym one day. A rap video came on. I was about to reflexively divert my attention & tune into a different video channel when I decided to watch it. I wanted to get an insight into my son's world. I watched these Black men on powerful motorbikes riding bare-chested in the sunshine. I watched the convertibles bouncing up and down in time to an incredible beat; I felt my pedalling rhythm speed up and sync with the beat involuntarily. I noticed my back riding up and down as I rode the rhythm. I was aware of the smile that crept across my face as I let go and took in the sunshine, the swagger of the men, their ostentatious macho glee beaming through scowling faces. High fives, man touches, muscle and risk. They were having fun! I was having fun! They didn't (seem) to give a damn about what the rest of the world thought of them. They were not going to be good boys and behave themselves. They were rebels in fun. That's it. It was fun! At a level I

loved it myself. There was a freedom that was all the more enticing for being unsensible.

Until we can find away to fashion a message with the attractiveness, the connectivity, the power, the desirability and enjoyability that can rival the MTV ones and their type, we do not stand a chance. That is our challenge. How can we immerse our children in a different reality?

The correct message is not enough. Telling them how this is going to be destructive to them is not effective. At lots of levels they know this. We need to have the medium, the space/ facilities, imagination; perspectives and resources that can make a difference that can make a difference.

Just creating Black versions of White schools with similar processes and measures of success is inadequate to impact broadly upon their perceptions, aspirations and achievement of large numbers. We need to have difficult discussions about the structure and processes of an education that can make a difference.

In fact, our experience has led us to believe that education as perceived and conceived; the parameters of the present discourse, limit our ability to see our own reality more congruently. If we think of education as only being about schools, or as being about school plus higher levels of parental support we run the risk of allowing others to determine the conceptual tools through which we analyse our situation as a people. If you use other people's ways of thinking then that conditions the actions that you take. It means that the actions you take and the 'solutions' you come to flow from their logic and interests - and these might not be the same as your own.

Strategies that can actually make a difference are what we need. We have tried much of what has been suggested today and this has not made a significant difference to the relative exam performance of children of African origin. We need new strategies that learn from and build upon our previous experiences and that take us into new, more successful directions.

These need to be holistic ~~and not simplistic~~. ” *(In my mind, I remembered a speech earlier on in which the speaker spoke of the need to send the children to school well-dressed and prepared for learning. Large parts of the audience seemed to approve of the message. I loved the emotion generated and I liked the sense of power contained in the belief that we can do something about our situation. I also felt it tapped in to older notions from the Caribbean and Africa (colonial) education systems; these notions that had their place and role in that place and time. I felt that the situation we faced needed more than that. This time and set of conditions required much more from parents than the need to dress their children well and watch over them as they did their homework.)*

“Doing all of that, dressing them well, sending them to church, loving them, even joining the PTA is not enough” I argued. “We have done that for our children for years. We send most of them to school clean and well fed. That does not stop them being excluded, undereducated and under-attached to the beliefs and values of success through education and alienated from many of the other values we would

wish them to hold. It does not stop too many of them being sent to jail with all the damage that that does to themselves, their families and our collective dreams and aspirations.”

I explained that we believed that the situation we face requires us to look deeply at our selves and at the situation we face. I did not give answers. I argued that there were no easy answers and what I was arguing for was for us to avoid easy, tried and tested solutions. That came from within the same old way of thinking about education.

I introduced the Sankofa Learning Centre as an example of doing something differently. I explained how we had come up with the (guerrilla-like) idea for getting around the rules & regulations. I spoke of how; with very limited resources we had managed to get children through their GCSE's and SATS at grades much higher than had been predicted for them when they attended school. I said that we had taken control over the education of these children. I also said that what we were doing was not perfect by far but that it was working better for the young people that attended than did the schools they had attended previously.

“Without modern computers, without fancy classrooms, without most of what modern day schools say you need we are achieving results better than ‘normal’ schools. But we do not measure the success of our pupils just by their exam results. In fact that is secondary. We measure their success by the kind of decent human beings they become able to lead decent lives that contribute to their community.

We do not have all of the answers. We believe that we are not doing nearly as well as we would like at Sankofa, but we have learned some things that we think might be useful as we carve a strategy for success for greater numbers of our young people”.

Time was running out and I was aware that I was eating into other speaker's space. I could see that the audience were interested and I wanted to give them what I felt were answers at the same time as feeling that that was not the most useful thing for me to be doing. I was supposed to raise questions and extol the virtues of trying out radical approaches such as Sankofa, but... I felt that people wanted answers and would feel short-changed if I did not give them any. I knew that I did not have time to explain all of the things I wanted to. I wished for a nice bullet-pointed list I could have run through quickly or a neat model. I began to perspire as I wished I had prepared in PowerPoint after all. I quieted myself with the memory that I wanted to speak *with* the audience rather than *to* them and that I wanted my presentation to be a cyclical exploration rather than a neat exposition of easy to hear and meaningless in terms of supporting effective action. I was a partner in a joint search for answers who was making a contribution towards that search.

I continued; in order to immerse our children in a different reality here are some of the things that we could do:

- We need to look at ourselves and take responsibility for creating new futures for ourselves. Do not always look to the school to provide the

answers – they do not have them. We have to learn ourselves so that we can help our children learn.

- We need to accept that our situation is linked to our historical reality as colonised and vanquished people and pretending that we were the same as others – starting from the same starting point as them - denies us the possibility of developing strategies that meet our real and quite specific needs. We are all human beings and so on a general level have the same human needs, but those needs are expressed differently depending upon specific background differences. One size does not fit all. African and Asian children, for example perform differently and so it is not a simplistic colour ‘racism’ that disadvantages our children. *It is to do with a set of factors that are specific to children of African origin and until we can identify what these may be and develop strategies to effectively meet them everything we try will fail.*
- We do not only need more of the same as other children – we need more of what works for us.
- We need to examine many of our present parenting behaviours and strategies and question whether they meet the needs of our situation

I briefly introduced the boys’ camp experience and spoke about how, speaking as a man, it had become apparent to me, and the other men on the camp, that men need to see fatherhood in a different light.

“We have to find ways of maintaining relationships with them that can influence them. This will mean changing many of the behaviours that we think of as principles. It means sometimes going places and doing things that we do not like doing in order to maintain a relationship. Men need to view fatherhood as a process not an event. They need to see that they are indispensable to the successful growth and development of their children, not just as providers – the women can often do that better than we can; not just as chastisers or even as role models, but as friends and boundary setters holders at the same time. That is difficult to do, but if we don’t manage it we increase the chances of losing our children.”

I spoke briefly about how the lessons from the boys’ camp experience had impacted upon the ways I tried to behave in relation to my own son.

I finished, I think, by stating that we had a responsibility to find strategies that make a change that make a change. I remember leaving wishing I had a more definitive finish that could make a greater impact. People clapped and a few came up to talk to me afterwards. Some wanted to know how they could assist at Sankofa, others just wanted to talk more and to thank me. Some people wanted my contact details. I was both happy and deflated. I felt both important and powerful and dissatisfied with my performance. I was happy that of all the talks I had heard that mine was the one that had – I felt – broken away from the normal paradigms in use. I was not happy about how well I had done so and the impact it had had and would have. I was pleased that I had not got into the ‘expert telling people what they need’ from a position of certainty. I remembered though how they had cheered the more bombastic speakers and wondered about the impact that my more collaborative, inquiring, exploratory style had had on people who might be

conditioned to other styles of exposition. I felt excited and a need to put the 'message' together more effectively. The people coming around, wanting to talk to me after my presentation, were an indication that I had had the effect upon them at least of stimulating their interest.

My log March 2002

Appendix 9. Section Four: Guidance Society postcolonial address

Guiding Success

A draft article prepared from a conference presentation at the Guidance Society annual conference 2 Oct 2003

I am delighted to have been asked to write up a summary of the presentation that I gave to the AGM of the Guidance Council on the 1.10.2003. I enjoyed my time with the participants there and felt that there was a genuine commitment to work with some of the issues that I raised. I have an aversion to repeating things and so this article seeks to capture the message of the presentation rather than repeat it.

In this article I want to: -

- invite you to believe that you, as guidance professionals, are specially located and consequently can play a highly significant role in changing the levels of disadvantage that people of African origin face in this society. I hope to show how, by so doing you can make a major contribution to yourselves personally as well as professionally, and to our society as a whole
- highlight a different way of understanding what we often refer to as the social exclusion/deprivation of Black people in this society
- position the notion of post-colonialism as offering understandings that take us beyond the present Equal opportunities/Diversity paradigms and offer the potential for developing strategies that can actually, significantly and positively impact upon the wasted, distorted lives that so many in our society live
- invite you, the reader, to engage in a kind of virtual collaboration with the intention of developing in y/our practice, ways of thinking and working that assist us as a society to engage with the realities of our post colonial situation in ways that transform and liberate those that have been colonised *and* those that have been colonisers
- suggest that, in order to contribute to this change, you need to reach out beyond what is normally conceived of as 'professional' practice and develop respecting and creative ways of engaging with Black people as 'partners in progress' in our mutual progress towards to a more just, fair and equitable society
- share some of my learning from my experience in setting up, with others, the Sankofa Learning Centre

There is a crisis amongst the Black community in this country. This topology is well documented. Many Black people do not have access to and enjoy the careers that their abilities would suggest they could have. This crisis is having a negative impact on their lives and this in turn has a wider social impact. I would like to suggest that guidance professionals could play a critical role in impacting positively on this situation because of their ability to respond with greater flexibility than many other agencies, institutions and individuals. In order to do so they must reflect their greater structural flexibility in the ways in which they conceptualise the present situation and the strategies they use to mobilise their energies and resources to meet it.

My concern in this piece is to do with Black people, and the role that guidance professionals can play in affecting our futures. This is an indication of focus. I recognise that many other groups have been the victims of racism, exploitation, discrimination and colonisation. I hope that, though the characteristics of their positions and histories may differ, some of the insights I offer here may be of value and relevance to them.

The background

I don't want to run through a wide and detailed range of indices in order to describe and 'prove' that this differential impact, this crisis exists. That is not the purpose of this piece. In many ways this piece is aimed at people who already have that awareness and are looking for strategies for working with it that can achieve the kinds of changes that previous approaches have failed to achieve. I will though give some examples; in employment Black people suffer the highest rates of unemployment, some three times higher than the average for White people in this country¹. Only 66% of all ethnic minorities are "economically active" compared to 80% of White. According to the Institute for Social and Economic Research, ethnic minorities in Britain are four times more likely to be living in poverty than White people.

From within the Black community this situation is recognised and concerns are expressed similarly and differently; there are also concerns about the high levels of mental illness, intra-family miscommunication and instability; discrimination and misunderstanding by education and other institutions and high levels of imprisonment have seriously impacted upon the aspirations, identity formation and culture generated by the Black young in this country. Attitudes of self hate that destabilise, distort and prevent successful relationship formation are also a serious concern. For many, a lack of sufficient economic power to provide the means to escape from this situation, or to exert sufficiently effective influence to change it, results in frustration that disempowers many. There are no safe havens, no 'liberated zones' to escape to.

Many have been the victims of unfair judicial processes, which have again placed them in a situation in which they are less likely to be enjoying productive relationships with Guidance professionals.

- One in every 100 Black British adults is now in prison, according to the latest Home Office figures.
- A recent crackdown on guns, drugs and street crime has led to an explosion in the number of prisoners from an Afro-Caribbean background, who now account for one in six of all inmates.
- The figures have sparked fears of an American-style penal system, where Black men are 10 times more likely to go to prison than Whites and one in 20 over the age of 18 is in jail.
- The number of Black prisoners in Britain's jails has risen 54% from 7,585 to 11,710 since Labour came to power.
- At 16% of all those in jail, the number of Black prisoners is hugely disproportionate to the general population, where African and Caribbean people make up just 2% of the total.

Oona King, Labour MP for Bethnal Green and Bow, writes:

"Given that my father is African American, I am very conscious of the fact that a quarter of all Black men under the age of 26 are in jail. We are nowhere near that in Britain, but I hope these figures will force people to reflect on the effect of the level of school exclusions, low academic achievement and increasing drug abuse on Black communities. At the same time we need to develop a penal system that rehabilitates rather than just punishes."

Why address this to guidance professionals?

The education system (and other government bodies and agencies) has tried a variety of strategies to address the lack of 'success' amongst Black young people. A lot has been done, but it has been done from within a paradigm whose norms do not allow it to identify the real issues and consequently, they have failed to reduce the attainment and employment gap between Black people and the majority population.

Working with many other Black people to set up the Sankofa Learning Centre was a reflection of a belief that White people had failed so significantly to create an appropriate education for children of African origin that we had to do it for ourselves and by ourselves.

The years of experience in Sankofa has not changed that view entirely but it has also helped me to understand that there is a critical role for 'partnership in progress' to play. Our futures are intertwined and, whether we like it or not, we can only create them together. This piece is then also an invitation to the reader to participate and collaborate in 'building upon the best that exists' and creating futures for all of us that enable us to move beyond the destructive legacy of colonisation and create something that is quite wonderful in its place.

There is a high degree of alienation amongst Black people with the traditional education system and the guidance that it provides. With high unemployment levels many Black adults also do not receive adequate or appropriate guidance. So, if that is the case why am I addressing this piece to guidance professionals? Well, partly because I was asked to and also because I believe that the Guidance Council and guidance professionals generally have more flexible structures and (often ways of thinking) than, for example, the traditional education system. It also has a tradition of using guidance as a way of addressing inequality and unfairness in our society. These factors place guidance professionals and their organisations in a position from which I believe that they could make a significant contribution to addressing the issues of exclusion that have blighted the lives of so many in the Black community if they are prepared to think differently.

Introducing a post-colonial perspective

I believe that one of the major reasons that strategies designed to address the inequality of outcome that many Black people experience in this society is because we have been looking in the wrong direction. The relationship that Black people and the rest of this society have is as a result of colonialism. This is an obvious statement to make but it has not been reflected in perspectives and their strategies that have variously focused on 'integration'; 'multi-culturalism'; 'anti-racism'; 'positive action' and, more recently, 'diversity'. These strategies may reflect strong values of humanity in their intention, but intention is not always enough. What they all have in common is that they are about integrating people into the existing status quo, into society as it is now. They extol values

and principles of fairness but that fairness is only within an existing paradigm that has emerged from a colonial past that it does not question or explicitly acknowledge. Rather than questioning the society itself, its history and economic modus operandi and the ways in which these recreate the conditions of a new kind of colonisation, they seek to “bring the victim in”.

There is a kind of collective amnesia; a socially sanctioned state of denial that wants to work with what is here now without looking at what has created it and what continues to define it. We are often asked to participate in looking at the issues of social disadvantage as they relate to people of African origin in an ahistorical manner. To question that approach is to risk being accused of not valuing the positive intent of those who adhere to it; or to have a chip on your shoulder; or to be stuck in the past, hung up about something that happened years ago. This is one of the reasons that many Black professionals in this country “don’t go there”. It does not help their professional careers.

It is almost as if you were saying

“We (or our foreparents) have destroyed the economies and social infrastructures of your countries of origin\ we have developed an ideology of racism which historically, conceptualises and locates Black people at the lowest level of human development/civilisation; we continue to exploit and grow rich from the natural resources of your countries whilst your people suffer from plagues of health like AIDS (and we then blame you for not being able to afford drugs to alleviate the conditions, or for being too sexually promiscuous), we glamorise and foster a criminal culture amongst your young people; we have so successfully controlled you for so long, that you believe destructive thoughts about yourselves and continue the process of your destruction without outside intervention. However, we care about you and are worried about the fact that you do not gain enough exam qualifications and so we are going to provide ‘positive action’ initiatives to help you better compete and fit into this system. Now all you have to do is work a little harder at school and everything will be OK!”

No. We need a different approach.

Beyond diversity and equality

If you want to create actual change then, I would suggest that we need genuinely creative perspectives and strategies that recognise and work with the realisation of the colonial dimension to our present social, economic, ideological and cultural context. They need to be of a different order than that we have worked with up to now. We need to work with serious intent to make a change that actually succeeds in its intent. This seriousness of intent needs to be solidly based in beliefs and actions that achieve transformation of a fundamental kind. The people who want to work in this way would have to be prepared to engage in iterative processes of action and reflection and more action and reflection that sought to discover and create those beliefs and actions. Part of their field of inquiry would have to be themselves. I have come to the realisation that you cannot engage in such a fundamental change process without it impacting upon you. It would be useful to embrace the possibility of change as something that expands your own humanity and quality of experience in life. The position that this is a process that is of benefit to all is critical as it values everybody in the process and assists all to see that they stand to benefit from this endeavour.

What would strategies look like that started from a position that acknowledged the influences of overt colonialism in the past and in our continuing neo-colonialism?

Well, they might start from recognition that Black people's 'social exclusion' is a creation of a traumatic reality that they /we have not been allowed to acknowledge and heal. It is a present reality and not an historical excuse for lack of motivation. It is an indication of colonial reality. If, for example, racism is generated by colonialism then colonialism has to be part of the terrain we explore if and as we seek change.

How can we develop relationships that transform that colonial pattern of domination and subordination into one characterised by equality, freedom, and independence and on into interdependence?

This is of course a huge question to ask. It is one that I feel does not have a ready-made answer waiting to be plucked from a conceptual shelf or government initiative. However, as is usually the case, asking the right questions is a surer way of arriving at a surer strategy than asking ones that have generated, what I consider to be, failed strategies in the past.

It might mean that the person wishing to engage as a professional in this process first needs to develop an understanding of the history, methods and impact of colonisation from the large school of academics Black and(?) White writing from an anti colonial position about the subject. This might lead to greater understanding and respect for behaviours that presently might seem inexplicable. This might assist in the development of personal (micro) behaviours that enable effective "getting alongside" and collaboration.

If colonisation removes the colonised of the power to exercise ~~independent~~ control over your space/land/mind, in fact over your life generally, then the addressing of issues to do with power would be a necessary component of our strategy. I would like to suggest that many Guidance professionals are in positions where they could form, or influence the formation of, respecting partnerships in which they are working with sections of the Black community in this country in processes that are about both parties gaining greater power over their lives, particularly if they think of their lives both wider than and inclusive of their 'professional' selves.

So, what would happen if guidance professionals saw themselves as partners more than, or as well as providers? What if these emergent partnerships were about assisting people gain greater independence and power over their lives?

If you say to me that you want to work with me so that I can gain greater control over my life and exercise greater power in defining who I am and what I choose to be and do, then I am going to be more interested than if I think that what you are doing is trying to shoehorn me into a 'career' or job in which I have to pretend aspects of my historical experience do not exercise considerable influence over my identity and my ability to participate freely and equally alongside my prospective colleagues.

This is not new stuff. In the 70's and 80's people like Paulo Friere and Ivan Illich encouraged educators to engage with the victims of colonialism as partners in social transformation that located the 'victims' as partners in their own liberation in a process that

is of joint benefit. Illich, for example, suggested that by “de-Schooling society” we could create a decentralised, locally determined, diverse education system designed to meet the varying needs of the populations it served. This would be in the interests of all who wanted to create a society in which the individual’s uniquenesses could flourish.

So, is it possible for us to move to a situation in which education, training and guidance is seen as a means to a colonised people gaining greater power to determine their future; to decolonise themselves; to regain pride in themselves for who they are, not for the extent to which they manage to integrate into the dominant paradigm?

What if White (and Black) professionals saw that this growth in power was in their own interests? That the more they were able to support economic growth, decolonising, independence, etc, the greater would be their own human growth, power and independence? I believe that we can move towards a healthier social unity by recognising and valuing our present diversity.

As many Guidance professionals work in the education system it might be fruitful to ask the following question. “In our present situation/context, what would a postcolonial perspective on education be?” Here are some initial thoughts: -

- It would take into consideration historical factors that typical approaches & perspectives do not
- It would include in its understanding of the education system the perspective of the colonised and the victims of colonisation as well as from the dominant perspective.
- (If it were to do that it may see, for example, that peoples’ concern is to do with exam qualifications *and* is also to do with changing their own and their children’s life chances. Education is seen as being as much about social transformation and personal/group (cultural/identity) reproduction as much as it is about social progression (within the present dominant paradigm). A critical distinction there.

I remember once speaking with a group of parents at the Sankofa Learning Centre and asking them what they most wanted for their children from Sankofa. They all said that what they wanted was for their children to grow into people who were capable of living good lives, being good people, contributing to their communities and being part of them. Exam qualifications were secondary. I speculate that that is because historically getting exam qualifications for previous generations of Black people did not guarantee them employment/career respect and success. It also did not protect them from unfair treatment at the hands of the police.

- Postcolonial perspective would look at strategies for change that are much more attached to the realities as experienced by the colonised than the present ones are. E.g. would not be able to look at the situation in this country without understanding them in their global context. Would not seek to understand the position of the colonised and the postcolonised in this country without looking at them in their global context and recognising that you cannot understand them without that global context.
- A Postcolonial perspective could look at racism as not just a disease of consciousness, which can be ‘cured’ by information that can transform that consciousness. It would hold that racism, as a creation of colonialism, can only be

supplanted by more human patterns of behaviour and belief, as and when the conditions of structural inequality integral to colonialism are deconstructed and 'new healthier patterns securely in the process of reconstruction' (? unclear sentence). It is a critical challenge for all of humanity because until we evolve as a species to a state in which we are able to do so then we condemn ourselves to a future of conflicts, famines, disease and wars that diminishes our nobler claims for our selves.

- History does not support the assumption that all you need is love/change of perspective – there needs to be practical action as well. So it would also look at taking action to transform the relationship of the colonised and their descendants with power. In plain terms - getting them more of it. It would seek to implement action to transform people's situation. Tackling racism needs to be only part of a range of strategies that have to be engaged with designed to enable those who do not have power over their lives to gain more of it. Working on the level of consciousness of personal feelings is not enough.

A colonised perspective

For the colonised, for education to be embraced, it has to be about redressing the distortions perpetuated by the existing education system.

For the colonised the education system may become a lot more relevant to their realities of experience if there are messages from sources of authority within it that seek to recognise the experiences that those colonised have. It may become a lot more relevant if it were to a) rediscover, recognise and value the great pre-European civilisations and cultures that Black (African) people have contributed to the world, e.g. Africa's defining contribution to Greek civilisation and to b) explicitly recognise that colonisation used different methods to control different groups of people and therefore had different effects on them. Addressing those difference would require different methods. With those people of African origin, who have been imbued with notions of their inferiority for example, it would need to explicitly develop credible strategies that help transform this belief system born out of and reproducing defeat.

New realities require new identities

A postcolonial identity is also critical. The colonised have been given/ have evolved a colonial identity that is a distortion of their own reality. Genuinely liberatory practices cannot evolve if their world is seen through the lenses of this identity. A Postcolonial education has to be about helping people develop *other* identities for themselves ones that are much more empowering, life enhancing and life giving. It's about seeking the value of and in your past/identity as you create new identities that enable you to survive and thrive in this postcolonial reality. This is about a reclaiming of history. If the colonised have been given an identity of colonialism and need to develop another identity, this 'new identity' needs to be both a conscious reconnection with the past and a viable creation capable of enabling re-emergence within the present situation as it seeks to change it and live within it as it removes colonial domination. It would be one in which people feel proud of themselves, as they develop strategies that enable success within and beyond this postcolonial reality.

All of the above is also pertinent for the descendants of the colonisers. What would a perspective on the past look like that sought to valorise and validate the past (which is what creates identity) - without celebrating the horrors of colonisation?

A Postcolonial education would recognise that people have to be engaged in the process of personal transformation. They would have to be engaged in a conscious reconnection and also a conscious recreation, because the situation has changed. Colonisation has happened. We, human beings, colonised and colonising, have changed as a result. We cannot undo the past. We can though learn from it and we can change the direction of the future.

That the victims are the ones who are charged with changing their situation is not such a problem. That they are blamed for it is. I am not proposing something that is totally new to Guidance professionals. My life and the lives of many others that I know have been hugely impacted by people who were prepared to 'think (and step) outside of the box', engage with the children they were employed to teach as learners themselves and as partners. In the process they discovered love, liberated hope and enabled greater life possibilities for those they worked alongside, for themselves and for those they love. I dedicate this piece to them as I extend an invitation to all who read this piece to reengage with the legacy they have left behind.

After I gave the presentation I was surrounded by people who wanted to speak with me. They came to the stage almost as if I were some kind of star. The few Black people in the audience made silent and really positive eye contact with me and one actually came up to me and thanked me for saying the things that I had. It was apparent that I had made a big impact upon the audience. A day or so later I received the email below from the conference photographer!

From: <PMSPPhoto@aol.com>
Date: Thu, 2 Oct 2003 08:05:50 EDT
To: <info@EdenCharlesAssociates.co.uk>
Subject: Guidance Council Photographs

Dear Eden,

As promised, please find attached a jpeg image from The Guidance Council meeting yesterday at Congress House, London. It's just a shame that they stopped me from taking further pictures during your actual speech.

Your speech was fascinating and I believe you made some very valuable points regarding the alienation of Afro-Caribbean youth from 'traditional' education. The education system urgently needs to address this issue, not by throwing further money at a system which is obviously failing, but to think, as you termed it "outside the box". The statistics from the United States on crime, education and the prison population will apply to the United Kingdom perhaps within a decade. I hope my outlook isn't too pessimistic, but living close to South Acton estate I see it developing further each day. American cultural imperialism is so all-encompassing within 'street culture' and the education establishment has to wake up and smell the coffee before it's too late.

How do you explain the value of education to a teenager growing up on a sink estate, who sees slightly older contemporaries driving around in a 40k BMW ? There is a whole generation who don't live within the predominant culture of what we could call 'deferred gratification' - a generation of outsiders who have opted out of our society.

I'm very glad to have met you yesterday and wish you all the best with The Sankofa Learning Project. Keep battling with the 'box-tickers' within the current educational establishment and if I can help with my skills as a photographer then please give me a call.

Best wishes,

Pete

Peter Stevens Photography



The picture that Peter took of me just before I spoke

Appendix 10. Section Four: Children's response, what success means to me

“Success means to me, that I have achieved what I wanted out of my life. I am honest, aware, respectful to myself and to others also self-disciplined. I am courageous but cautious, confident but not full of myself and creative but not stupid. Personally, if I can find my natural abilities and make a living out of them, that is a success in itself.

If I have a family with children, I would like them to have known their grandparents, great aunts and uncles, etc. etc. if it is possible. Regardless of what happens between the mother, and me I would like them to have known I still love them and I will try and help them with whatever positive activity they need help.

You cannot achieve success by yourself. E.g. if you get a basketball scholarship for a particular school or team, someone has paid for you to get that get that scholarship. It could be your parents, the team treasury or your council. So, this is just to say that if you achieve success someone has paved the way!

In that short presentation were most of the values we had wanted the children to develop. Success being about more than money; in this piece it was about responsibility to others, seeing yourself as part of a larger whole.

My mood started to change as one by one the children read out moving pieces of work. The children who had given the most difficulty seemed to have produced some of the most pertinent pieces. Maybe we had made a difference after all. I thought to myself. When one of the boys read out his bit that spoke of how he wants to be a role model for other Black children my eyes watered. And then, I fought the tears openly running down my face as my son read out what he had written:

What African history means to me.

African history is filled to the brim with interesting exciting and important information. As a Black person of African origin I think it is very important that I know and understand my history. Black history is often hidden and or given an ugly face so it is compelling that Black people know the truth and do not think bad things about their history. This is because attitude towards ones history changes the way one thinks about their own unique self. Many Black people believe that their history is negative, hence their perception of life themselves and their people.

The relevance of African history to me is important because it helps me understand why certain things happen to us (Black people) up to this day. The racist feelings other peoples have had towards us in the past has not completely vanished and so it is critical that we start making changes, and we can start by learning about our history.

African history means to me; a history which dates back further than any other civilisation. African history is a history for any Black person to be proud of because in it African history holds some of the world's greatest minds, sculptures,

buildings, arts and people. Evidence shows that Africans were quite civilised in history and were not swinging from trees, and acting like monkeys.

I love my African history and I am very proud of it.

Another pupil, a girl, only 8 years old had written:

Helping My Black People

I would like all Black people to think about their ancestors and change

I would like to raise money to give it to Black countries

I would like to make a charity to help to build schools in Africa and employ good Black teachers.

I would like to help raise money to help Black people pass all their exams by getting tutors.

I would like to help people who are physically challenged.

OK. So it was not perfect but there it was. Our children demonstrating their development as people who recognised that they had a history and culture to be proud of. Using knowledge of that history to understand their present experiences. We had achieved that much and at that moment it felt as if maybe it had all been worth it. That was an important morning to me.

Appendix 11. Section Four: Other Research Activity

I want to bring to the attention of the reader a variety of other activity that I have been involved in that has contributed to the present state of my thinking in relation to the education of the Black child.

Interviewing 240 people on the streets in South London

While New Education Initiatives was still in existence we spent several Saturdays interviewing parents about their views on education and alternatives for Black children. Some interesting things that came out of that were:

- 82% would be prepared to pay for a satisfactory education in principal though less than 37% felt that they could afford to do so
- 87% felt that the biggest thing lacking from existing education provision was respect for 'Black' culture and that the teaching of Black history was the best way to remedy this
- 6% had sent their children abroad to be educated

Cooperative inquiry with groups of Black teachers

I facilitated a cooperative Inquiry group of Black teachers exploring the micro and macro level of the issues to do with Black children. The group met 3 times in 1999. When we pulled together the conclusions we were coming to our findings were :-

- Low expectation of Black children in the schools by White teachers (and some Black ones!!)
- Low morale & disaffection amongst teachers generally has an added impact upon Black teachers
- Significant failure to recognise cultural diversity allied to policies that "treat everybody the same" leads to low attainment. There needs to be greater emphasis placed on addressing the particular needs of particular groups rather than having a one-size-fits-all model.
- A sense of powerlessness. Many Black teachers feel unable to significantly affect the direction of the schools they work in though they can have a positive impact upon individual pupils' motivation and achievement
- There is an issue to do with the (physical) appearance of Black pupils and the ways in which this can trigger (subconscious) reactions from teachers that negatively impact the pupils. Black boys are often seen as threatening:
- The White teachers share the ignorance and stereotypes about Black people common to this society. They would have to BE different in order to DO different. That is they would have to undergo an educational process which challenged their value system and informed and assisted the development of new beliefs and behaviours
- The pressures that all teachers are under block the kind of creative thinking and behavioural flexibility needed to significantly improve the quality of the education that Black pupils receive
- At present the teachers groups are working on how their research can inform the content and format of a pack for parents

Interviews with Black head teachers & senior teachers

- I spent time having what we called strategic conversations with three deputy heads and four head teachers. As I reflect upon the transcripts and notes I am struck by the low morale that so many of them had. Once they took off their professional hats and spoke about what it was like being them and doing their job there was a marked lack of optimism. In fact there was a very strong view expressed by each of them that themselves being victims of racism and policies that blocked them from doing what they knew would make a difference. One person said “Its difficult to make a to make a change and appear “professional”. Another summarised his view of their collective situation thus

“We know how to make a difference but are blocked from doing so by teachers’ (bounded) perceptions about what their role as teachers are, the unions, unacknowledged racism, a lack of resources, pressures to select out/ exclude ‘difficult’ pupils, government perceptions about education and their subsequent policies”

Two of the people I spoke to were retired, though they were not yet in the 50’s. I have come to the conclusion that they were suffering from burnout.

The two retired people were making new lives for themselves and were basically very optimistic about their futures, but they would not return to work in schools they said.

Creating interactive Web site (over 100 visits a month)

I created a web site with questionnaires on it for people to complete. Only about 30 people did so, but we were getting close to one hundred ‘hits’ a week at one stage. The site, in its inquiry form, stayed up for over a year. I have subsequently created another one that provides information about the Learning Centre but does not invite people’s views.

Inquiring into African centred Education in the USA

I attended 2 conferences in the USA; ‘Government Policy & the education of Black children’ - New York and ‘The Sankofa conference on approaches for success’ - Washington DC. Whilst there I travelled through 4 states and visited and researched 3 schools there. I spoke with teachers and children and established ongoing relationships with academics and practitioners across the USA as a result. These connections have enriched my thinking. I wrote a brief summary of my key observations I recorded from my visits to African centred schools in the US. To restate them even more briefly now they are that an education focused on the specific needs of African children can significantly raise achievement. It requires “just good teaching” involving high expectations, the expression of love, good teachers - of different types - a variety of methodologies were seen as being effective, positive teaching and valuing of them and their culture.

I found the children to be keen to learn and able to exist existed comfortably in the world of school and of the ‘street’. They had high expectations of themselves & a desire to give back to the community. I noted an attitude that was respectful of adults and was pleased to see that the teaching methods encouraged them to learn from each other as well as from teachers. In all of the schools, and all of the teachers I spoke to, reinforced the fact that parents are critical in the success of the pupils and of the schools. The schools all sought (to varying degrees and with varying degrees of success) to “work with parents attitudes”.

Good, appropriate resources are also essential. There has to be sources of other perspectives, images, thinking and materials generally.

I was impressed by the teachers' commitment to the children more than I was to their approach to assisting children learn. I did feel though that they were having a lot of success. I came to the conclusion that what most of the teachers had in common was that they openly expressed love for the children and I think that goes a long way in compensating for teaching that is not always as creative as I would like to see it.

I managed to have two 'strategic conversations' with White teachers who expressed a commitment to working for the success of Black pupils to their Black colleagues who introduced them to me. The conversations never went as far as I would have liked basically because I did not have the time to follow them up. What I did conclude from the two discussions we had was that these teachers really wanted to make a contribution and that they recognised that there is a need for radical alternatives to their present practice.

To my surprise they said that they valued access to the materials that we have placed on the internet in supporting the work that they are doing on identity formation with their White & Black pupils. They expressed concern that there is a general lack of clarity about what is meant by 'culture' and the perspective that are most used in schools do not take into account power differentials between groups and the subsequent need of work with culture to address this adequately.

The conversations reinforced my sense that there are some highly committed White teachers who would like to make a difference who feel constrained by government expectations, peer expectations and their own lack of clarity about what the best thing to do is. They also shared with me a fear of being seen as 'rebels' and jeopardising their careers by speaking out strongly on some of these issues.

Interviews/ collaborative discussions with OFSTED inspectors

I had meetings and discussions with 3 OFSTED inspectors. (2 White, 1 Black). One of whom has requested anonymity as a condition of participation in the research (another one I'm sure wants it but has not said so explicitly). In each case we did not call it a research interview but a conversation that was an exploration of them as human beings doing a job sharing their experiences and views. I tried hard to put them at ease and encouraged them to not stay within the barriers of their professional roles. I assured them of confidentiality and I was amazed at the level of what I would call fear they expressed about being identified as not toeing the line. Some of the most interesting areas emerging from the meetings and exchanges are:-

- Teachers are under too much pressure to voluntarily undertake the kind of personal changes necessary to break the existing patterns of failure
- High-level policy decisions are too politically based to enable open exploration and concept re-evaluation. They are stuck within the existing paradigm. Power is so centrally held, and uncontested, that even inspectors feel unable to challenge that paradigm openly in some instances.
- Teachers are often unaware of their racism. I have heard descriptions of overt racist behaviour from teachers in front of (White senior) inspectors towards Black pupils without concern of the inspectors' presence.

- There are only 43 secondary schools with over 20% of Black Caribbean pupils in the whole country. If there was high level recognition of the issues and serious commitment to make change this is not a great number to focus on
- There is a reluctance to publish findings that contradict the policy direction that the government has in place. Serious alternative strategies would need to emerge from independent sources
- off the record, all the inspectors support the need for the Black community to take greater charge over the education of their children.
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Inquiring with a group of Black social workers

I spoke with a group of Black social/care workers and asked them their views on what it would take to make a difference. Interestingly some spoke of the problem being rooted in what happens in the child's first few years of life. They spoke of the need for parents to engage differently with their children. Some of the things that they concluded were needed were:-

- More collaborative approaches to parenting needed
- Need for richer investment in pre school years
- Need for both parents to recognise that they have a critical role to play in their children's development throughout their childhood
- Need for greater support to replace extended family. Need for new family forms appropriate to the time, place and environment.

Mixed race children are particularly vulnerable and there needs to be greater resources available for them to support their balanced development
