

# ***Nsaka Sunsum (Touching the Spirit): A Pedagogy and Process of Black Educational Excellence***

By

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and

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## **Hamilton Naki,**

Hamilton Naki, a laborer who became a self-taught surgeon of such skill that Dr. Christiaan N. Barnard chose him to assist in the world's first human heart transplant in 1967, but whose contribution was kept secret for three decades because he was a black man in apartheid-era South Africa. Mr. Naki, who left school at 14 and had no formal medical training, spent five decades working at the University of Cape Town. Originally hired as a gardener there in about 1940, he acquired his formidable surgical skills through years of silent observation and covert practice at the university's medical school. Mr. Naki died on May 29 at his home in Langa, near Cape Town. He was believed to have been 78.

## **Vivian Thomas,**

Vivian Thomas, who with no medical degree, and essentially self-taught became the teacher of world class surgeons at Johns Hopkins, and partner in practice to Blalock, head of surgery at Johns Hopkins, and who also pioneered the blue-baby surgery techniques. Later he was given an honorary degree and recognized as a member of the medical faculty at Johns Hopkins. The movie "Something the Lord Made" chronicles the story of Vivian Thomas.

## **Ben Carson**

Perhaps the greatest neurosurgeon in history is Ben Carson. His story is told in the book "Gifted Hands." He was formerly considered to be "mentally slow." Yet he was the first to perform surgery to separate Siamese twins joined at the brain successfully.

Hamilton Naki, Vivian Thomas, and Ben Carson are not aberrations or anomalies. They were and are without question exemplars of excellence. These men are special but not exceptional. They are typical of the millions of Black youth in both pre- and post-apartied Union of South Africa (USA) and pre and post segregated United States of America (USA). Most assuredly their quest for excellence was marred by white supremacy, racial discrimination and African dehumanization. It is highly probable that they had to confront low expectations, erroneous assumptions about their learning potential and inferior learning environments. Yet how do you explain their being and becoming relative to the question of educational excellence? It is with

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this question, the question of being and becoming that I wish to shift the discussion of Black education away from socio-economic factors, class divisions and even racial classification (as defined in a racialized society). The crises in Black education is not that Black children are failing to achieve comparable to white children. Nor is it that the educational system, as currently constructed, is failing Black children. In fact, in terms of both these regards, the educational system is doing exactly what it is designed to do and is doing it quite well. Black children are supposed to be academically inferior to whites and the system is not designed to educate Black children.

## **Cultural Antimony: The Root of the Problem**

Obviously the "problem" is deeper (or found in a different place) than current discussions of Black academic underachievement, intellectual inferiority, achievement gap reduction, school reform, charter schools, or privatization. Would segregation, integration, open enrollment, bussing, vouchers, etc, have changed the experiences of Hamilton, Vivian or Ben? I think not. The Hamiltons, Vivians, and Bens of the Black world have been bussed, integrated, segregated, vouchered, disenfranchised, chartered and privatized while the overall educational experiences of Black people have remained constant. The crisis in Black Education or more accurately the paradox in Black education is evidenced by the simultaneous overall failure of Black children and the routine exceptional achievement of Black children; i.e., the Bens, Vivians, and Hamiltons. The Bens, Vivians, and Hamiltons are evidence that the so-called crisis in Black education is certainly not because of the socioeconomic factors, class distinctions, or racial classifications.

In 1890 and 1891 the leading white educators, missionaries, philanthropists and politicians, including Rutherford B. Hayes, former president of the United States, participated in the "Mohonk Conference on the Negro Question" (Barrows, 1969)<sup>3</sup>. Starting with the premise of African savagery and that slavery was a step up the ladder of civilization, America's learned elite adopted an educational platform or strategy which aimed to complete the Negroes' ascent to civilization by supplying teachers and preachers, who would be anointed as "leaders of the Negro race." They would be educated in common English studies and in the English Bible" (Barrows; 1969, p 109). Carruthers (1995) notes in this regard that the resulting system of Negro education controlled by whites and driven by a curriculum of white supremacy is the basis of the

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<sup>3</sup> It is of interest to note that America's intellectual elite also met to plan or craft white education as well. In fact, a year after the Mohonk conference, which included conferencing about how best to educate Native Americans, in 1892 the National Educational Association established the Committee of Ten (Elites). This body was comprised of the President of Harvard University CHARLES W. ELIOT; The Chairman of the Commission of Education in Washington D.C., WILLIAM T. HARRIS, The President of the University of Michigan, JAMES B. ANGELL, The President of Vassar College, JAMES M. TAYLOR, , The President of the University of Colorado, JAMES H. BAKER,;, The President of the University of Missouri, RICHARD H. JESSE, Principal of the High School, Albany, N. Y. OSCAR D. ROBINSON,;, Head Master of the Lawrenceville School, JAMES C. MACKENZIE, and the Head Master of the Girls' High School and the Girls' Latin School, Boston, Mass.; JOHN TETLOW. These elites were charged with studying and making recommendations for America's (white America) overall educational program. The committee recommended that the terminal students be given the same program as those who were headed for college. The Committee of Ten assumed that every child would benefit by receiving a liberal education of the highest quality. Its most controversial recommendation was that all children should receive an academic education, differentiated only by which foreign languages were learned.

current crises in education in the USA. Parenthetically, the current Bush administration's, "faith-based initiative" (note the targeting of the Black church and control of schools) may be a modern day version of the Mohonk plan and a furthering of the so-called crises or paradox in Black education.

A closer examination, however, of this paradox suggests that the real crisis in Black education is a crisis of culture. It is a crisis of culture because culture, as the medium wherein life is defined and developed, is where the meaning of being human is found. Culture, though multi-faceted, is where human beings give fundamental expression to their meaning, possibility and potential. Hence, the crises in Black education is found in the organized structure and process of education that has absolutely no regard for the African meaning of being human nor respect for educational requisites of reproducing and refining African possibilities and potentials.

In a society defined by white supremacy, educational systems grounded in racial objectification would by definition and design be incapable of educating those considered racially inferior. It is obvious to me that psychology has been instrumental in the success of education to not educate Black children. Psychology is pivotal to the project of education, and it is not surprising that the way in which psychology defines and explicates the issues of normality, intelligence, achievement, motivation, etc. almost predetermines the process of education. Psychological issues, topics and conceptualizations are vital to the workings of education. The mid-19th century philosopher and psychologist, Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) is considered by many to be the first voice of the modern era of psycho-educational thought. An empiricist, dedicated to observational methods and mathematical psychology, he promoted teaching by means of a logical progression of learning consistent with the laws of psychology. In many ways he paved the way for James, Hall, Dewey and Thorndike, the undisputed paternity of Educational Psychology. In fact, one need not look too far afield to recognize, for instance, the pragmatism and functionalism found in William James' *Principles* (1892)<sup>4</sup> or his *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (1899) to see their fundamental application in American education. William James, his student G. Stanley Hall, and Hall's student, John Dewey all agreed that psychology had to take a major interest in education and that psychology was destined to be the master science of pedagogy.

While given the accolade of being the grandfather and granduncles of educational psychology (Berliner, 2005) each of these men also reflected and represented the rabid and vulgar racism and classism of their time. In this regard, G. Stanley Hall, in particular, is of special importance in the formation of psychology's relation to education<sup>5</sup> and the grounding of educational

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<sup>4</sup> James' work was published less than a year following the infamous Mohonk conference, and these men were contemporaries in the most inhuman era of crimes against African people.

<sup>5</sup> Hall, as the president of Clark University waged intellectual warfare with the President of Harvard University, T.S. Elliot, concerning amongst other things the Committee of Ten's liberal notion of education for the white masses. Hall, was in fact, the most caustic critic of the report. He was relentless in his efforts to tarnish the report. Renowned at the turn of the century as the founder of the child study movement, Hall derided the proposal that every subject "should be taught in the same way and to the same extent to every pupil so long as he pursues it." Calling this "a masterpiece of college policy," Hall declared that "this principle does not apply to the great army of *incapables*, shading down to those who should be in schools for *dullards* or *subnormal children*, for whose *mental development heredity* decrees a slow pace and early arrest, and for whom by general consent both studies and methods must be different." Hall's influence was driven by both racism and class warfare.

psychology in racial objectification. G. Stanley Hall received the first doctorate in psychology in America at Harvard University under William James and Henry P. Bowditch in 1878. He began as a professor of “psychology and pedagogics” at Johns Hopkins University in 1882. When Clark University opened in 1889, Hall began as the president, and remained there until his death in 1924.

Hall had a remarkable and singular impact on the development of American psychology. By 1893, he had supervised and shaped 11 of the 14 American Ph.D.’s in psychology. By 1898, 30 of 54 American Ph.D.’s in psychology were trained by him. His students included notable psychologists like Arnold Gesell, Lewis Terman, and four future APA presidents, James McKeen Cattell, John Dewey, Joseph Jastrow, and Edmund C. Sanford. Hall's interests centered around child development and evolutionary theory. He was considered "*the* great teacher of graduate students during the first decades of American psychology" (Hothersall, 1990, p. 296).

It is important, however, to also share his beliefs about African people. Hall<sup>6</sup> was deeply influenced by the Malthusian doctrine. His philosophy reflected the essence of the Machiavellian theory which also deals with the dichotomy of White and Black. Hall believed, for example, that “what is true and good for one (i.e., the Caucasian and the African) is often false and bad for the other”. If we are allowed to reflect back on the period in history in which Hall was born, we would see however that he had reached adulthood before the American system of slavery was abolished. With this in mind, we realize that Hall had internalized the myths and propaganda about racial inferiority, stupidity, and laziness regarding those of African ancestry. In fact, in a blatant justification for slavery, and possibly in counter-position to the writing of a young Black sociologist named W.E.B. DuBois, G. Stanley Hall published a treatise on “*The Negro in Africa and America*”. In this work Hall states that: *Among tribes of Dahomey,...and in the Fan, Felup Wolop, Kru, and other strips... sometimes resort to cannibalism, use an agglutinative speech, believe profoundly in witchcraft, are lazy, improvident, imitative, fitful, passionate, affectionate, faithful, are devoted to music and rhythm and have always practised slavery amongst themselves.* He goes on to state as fact that “polygamy is universal, fecundity is high, and mortality great. Strong sex instincts are necessary to preserve the race. As soon as the child can go it alone, it begins to shift for itself. Stealing is universal and is a game and falsehoods are clever accomplishments”. This the most influential maker of American psychologist,s goes on to say, “Our slaves came from the long narrow belt, not many miles from the sea...It is surprising to see how few of his aboriginal traits the Negro has lost, although many of them are modified” (1905, p. 350).

Hall’s racism was, however, not limited to only Black people. ~~extended to include~~ Indians and Chinese into the group he classified as “adolescent races”. Hall fervently believed that no two races differed more in their physical and psychological traits as did the Caucasian and the African. In relation to his “recapitulation theory,” he accordingly considered Black people to be in a stage of incomplete growth. He also believed that heredity was the dominant factor determining educational capacity.

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<sup>6</sup> Hall had an ongoing battle with the cultural anthropologist, Franz Boas, regarding the capacity of Black people. Hall’s racism and perceived infringement on academic freedom resulted in Boas and a number of Clark’s faculty resigning in protest.

While discussing the historical role and responsibility of individual key shapers of Western psychology, like G. Stanley Hall, one should not reduce the problem to the personality flaws or conventions of persons of a by-gone error. Hall is iconic and his thinking is typical of Western thought. The problem, therefore, is not grounded in personalities but in the cultural grounding from which they stand (and think). In another context I noted that it was indeed unfortunate that the development of the discipline of psychology paralleled (and may have in fact assisted in) the establishment of Eurocentrism and White supremacy as a world order. As a consequence of this co-terminal development, I also noted that the question of what is authentic culture and how to understand and assess the human experience of other people have undergone continuous confusion, debate and criticism. What has been lost in this confusion is the fact that when the cultural substance or deep structure between two or more cultures stands in contradistinction of each other, what results is the failure to see the contradiction in their respective meanings of reality. This contradiction of meaning results in a state of "Cultural Antimony". Implicit in the notion of cultural antimony is the paradox (a statement or tenet, which is discordant with what is held to be established belief) of Black education. The Euro-American belief (now presented as objective scientific findings) about African and African-American "inferiority" stands in contradistinction with the belief about African "superiority" which is also found in European historical consciousness. Because the intellectual atmosphere of negation and nullification supported by Western psychology has been so pervasive, it has been difficult to separate its culturally grounded conceptualizations, data and findings of Black inferiority from the contrary evidence, opinion and belief. The fact that the White community set about to develop scientific theories about Black inferiority does not change the state of antimony.

Western psychology as the master science of education has resulted in a state of cultural antimony wherein the question of educational excellence for Black children is perceived as a contradiction to White supremacy. The fundamental problem of educational excellence for Black children is found in the specific cultural antimony (i.e., contradiction in law or between two laws) is in the assumed White superiority. Recognizing this alone, however, will not achieve educational excellence.

What we, as African (Black) psychologists and educators, must do is to boldly, without apology or explanation, develop models of pedagogy and practice that stand on our own cultural ground.

## **The Question of Educational Excellence and the Role of African (Black) Psychology**

The "Hallian" shaping of American psychology and its 100-year molding of educational psychology has been a "sojourn of sadness" for Black people and the education of our children. In fact, American education driven by the master science of Western psychology has resulted in Black educational outcomes wherein educated Africans are at best, in fact and function, nothing more than vulgar careerists or what Fanon called "obscene caricatures of Europe and pathetic imitators of their oppressors." In addition to the nature of white supremacy that infects western psychology, there is also the related problem of intellectual hegemony and the colonization of the meaning of being human.

Hence, it seems to me that the role of African (Black) psychologists relative to the question of Black educational excellence is to (1) expose the history and disconnect from the legacy of White psychology and (2) offer an independent African (Black) psychology that illuminates the human spirit of the African child and gives the psycho logic for the foundation of educational excellence with African children. It is our responsibility to define the contours, contexts and content of being, becoming (and belonging) African and human and the associate meaning of human normality, naturalness and functionality. In effect, we, African (Black) psychologists, must, in my opinion, achieve the following: (1) change the discursive space where ideas about the meaning of being human are debated and emerge; (2) deconstruct and de-legitimize the hegemonic European framework and paradigm for knowing things African; and, (3) reclaim and re-invent African-centered philosophy, practice and praxis relative to educational excellence with African American children. Clarifying the African (Black) meaning of being human and guiding the construction of educational pedagogy and process aligned with that meaning is the critical role and responsibility of African (Black) psychologists.

There is still debate in the field relative to the definition of the term, Black Psychology. Africentric Psychology, African Centered Psychology and African (Black) Psychology have all had some currency in the field and in many ways are interchangeable. In my own work, I have moved to the term “Sakhu Sheti,” which I defined as the deep, profound and penetrating search, study, understanding and mastery of the process of the illumination of the human spirit.

However, for this discussion, I am very comfortable with the term African (Black) Psychology which by agreement, the Association of Black Psychologists defined as the following:

*"African Centered psychology (Africentric psychology) is a dynamic manifestation of unifying African principles, values, and traditions. It is the self-conscious "centering" of psychological analyses and applications in African reality, culture, and epistemology. African centered psychology examines the process that allows for the illumination and liberation of the Spirit. Relying on the principles of harmony within the universe as a natural order of existence, African centered psychology recognizes: the Spirit that permeates everything that is; the notion that everything in the universe is interconnected; the value that the collective is the most salient element of existence; and the idea that communal self knowledge is the key to mental health. African psychology is ultimately concerned with understanding the systems of meaning of human beingness, the features of human functioning, and the restoration of normal/natural order to human development. As such, it is used to resolve personal and social problems and to promote optimal functioning."*

Hence, the question of educational excellence should, I believe, be informed by and congruent with an independent construction of African (Black) human functioning reflective of a deep, profound and penetrating search, study, understanding and mastery of the process of the illumination of the human spirit.

In the following discussion I will provide a, albeit limited and preliminary, review of one attempt to reclaim and reinvent an African-centered pedagogy and process of Black educational excellence consistent with this calling, ergo the Nsaka Sunsum.

## **Culture is to Humans as Water is to Fish**

A people's indigenous culture anchors them to reality and must be the starting point for all learning. Education, as a human activity, is cultural. The role and purpose of education is to allow each generation in society to rationally guide and systematically guarantee that it reproduces and refines the best of itself and by so doing pass on to the next generation its accumulated wisdom, and the knowledge and skills necessary to develop, maintain and participate in the society of the future. By determining the general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality, culture naturally identifies what is considered wisdom and knowledge and what should be reproduced and refined.

The role of culture in education means that education must be consciously guided by an awareness, understanding and utilization of the historical conditions and cultural experiences that shape and give meaning to each child's reality. Educational excellence means that the goal of the educational process is to have every child's performance match maximal educational attainment. Placing children or centering them within the context of familiar cultural and social references from their own historical settings is key to fostering better students who are more disciplined and who have greater motivation for school work.

Culture gives meaning to reality. It is as essential to education as it is to psychology. As in psychology, in education culture is essential. Culture gives meaning to reality. As such, culture has the power to compel behavior and the capacity to reinforce ideas and beliefs about human functioning, including educational achievement and motivation (Nobles, 1979). Culture is the invisible medium that encompasses all human existence. It is important to note that nothing human happens independently of culture. "Culture is to humans as water is to fish." It is our total environment. A people's indigenous culture anchors them to reality and must be the starting point for all learning.

Education, as a human activity, is cultural. The role and purpose of education is to allow each generation in society to rationally guide and systematically guarantee that it reproduces and refines the best of itself and by so doing pass on to the next generation its accumulated wisdom, and the knowledge and skills necessary to develop, maintain and participate in the society of the future. By determining the general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality, culture naturally identifies what is considered wisdom and knowledge and what should be reproduced and refined.

It is recognized that African Americans, as a group, are culturally complex. Despite the tremendous variety that exists among them, most African Americans continue to share elements of a common culture. These characteristics are grounded both in African culture and in the experiences that African Americans have had in North America.

For educators, developing an understanding that the culture of African Americans is rooted in and influenced by African culture provides a context for recognizing new opportunities to foster educational excellence as well as for analyzing and responding to factors that do not resonate with our culture and/or learning style.

Sadly, the driving force for most of our educational history, relative to culture, has been the erroneous belief in the homogeneity of American culture and the disdain and inability to recognize and respect the culture of African American students. The culture of the school for the most part exemplifies a lack of understanding of the learning styles and life experiences of African American students (Nobles, 1992). Teacher training programs, most curriculum designs, and instructional materials are Eurocentric. As such they reflect middle-class Anglo experiences, perspectives, and value priorities (Gay, 1989). When children have been socialized in ways that are inconsistent with school expectations and patterns, they have to make a difficult daily adjustment to the culture of the school and their teachers. (Guild, 1994). But this is a problem that we are aware of, so who is expected to change, the schools or the kids? It does not serve the purpose of the educational system to change or accept the culture of the students. The students do not know the culture of the school; therefore, we have a cultural mismatch.

The role of culture in education means that education must be consciously guided by an awareness, understanding and utilization of the historical conditions and cultural experiences that shape and give meaning to each child's reality. Educational excellence means that the goal of the educational process is to have every child's performance match maximal educational attainment. Placing children or centering them within the context of familiar cultural and social references from their own historical settings is key to fostering better students who are more disciplined and who have greater motivation for school work. This does not mean incorporating stereotypical or superficial cultural aspects of familiarity into the educational framework.

Clearly, it is possible to maximize the educational attainment of African American children by incorporating and applying the set of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, character and behaviors essential to achieving mastery of all aspects of human functioning.

The culture of African American people defines and determines educational excellence for African American children. In effect, culture should be understood as a significant intellectual and pedagogical tool that directly influences teaching and learning. Hence, every aspect of the educational process for African-American children (i.e., curriculum, classroom management, site leadership, learning styles, instructional techniques, etc.) will benefit from the infusion and/or application of the students' culture. Again this does not mean incorporating stereotypical or superficial amounts of culture. An important question is, how do we use culture -- the spirit and energy of a people -- to bring about educational excellence?

In utilizing culture in the service of educational excellence with African American children, a culturally consistent educational process would reflect:

1. the belief that every African American child can learn everything and/or anything;
2. a process wherein knowing and knowledge are connected directly to the child;
3. instructional techniques which are characterized by cooperation and mutuality;
4. the blending of individual achievement with collective advancement;

5. the desire to continually guide each child to the next higher level of functioning;
6. the underlying goal of personally contributing to one's own as well as to everyone's fulfillment;
7. teaching and learning that are linked to the students' and the community's well-being and welfare; and
8. a process wherein cooperative effort is utilized to continually raise the standard of educational excellence.

### **The Nsaka Sunsum (Touching the Spirit)**

In the indigenous culture of traditional African and African American communities, the "Ontological Principle of Consubstantiation"; i.e., that we are of the same spirit or essence, is the paramount idea that influences our values, beliefs, behaviors, rituals, customs and practices. This principle translates to the notion of the "Oneness of being/Unity of all things". It means that all things in the Universe, whether animate or inanimate, have the same essence; i.e., spirit. In effect, all things, all matter, are merely different manifestations of the same one spirit. Spirit is everywhere and in everything. Hence, there is a constant communion between the visible (tangible) and the invisible (intangible), between feminine and masculine, between teaching and learning, between the natural (human) and the super-natural (God) (Nobles, 1995). "Spirit is the life force or energy which comes from God. It is the totality of being, becoming and belonging to God. Spirit is the Divine spark which gives human beings their "(be)ingness". It is the essence of which "becoming" is an on-going expression. Spirit is the evidence that humans "belong" to a Divinely governed natural order. It is that which enlivens the body and lives on after the body dies." Clearly the notion of spirit or spiritness (Nobles, 1997) should be essential to the project of Black education.

*The Nsaka Sunsum Educational Pedagogy and Process for Educational Excellence with African American Children* (Nobles, 1999) is, in part, based on applying specific cultural ideas and techniques designed to establish a teaching and learning environment wherein a teaching/learning process is created to help the teacher to connect deeply with the Spirit (essence) of the child so as to animate, arouse, affect and/or influence the student's exalted feelings, thoughts or actions in the service of learning.

The Nsaka Sunsum educational pedagogy and process views teaching and learning as a "divine dance" between the life's purpose and mission of both the teacher and the student. It is believed that each and everyone of us comes from Heaven to "learn" a particular set of lessons, which are required for us to become "better" human beings, while at the same time each of us comes from Heaven with a particular set of "gifts" to be given to the world in order to make living better for us all. The lessons to be learned as life's purpose are expressions of wisdom and the gifts to be given as life's mission are expressions of love. For both the student and the teacher, every teaching moment is an opportunity to learn a lesson or to give a gift.

In this divine dance, it is expected that the teacher will have greater insight and consciously express both wisdom and love by continually exploring the student's purpose and mission while

uncovering the lessons to be learned and gifts to be given by them. The spark that ignites this divine dance and always determines its rhythm is “spirit”. It is important, therefore, to recognize that in “touching the spirit” of the student, the teacher is able to tap into the human instinct or desire to become better. Every child is endowed with this instinct or desire. Allow us to restate this point: the teacher is able to tap into the human instinct or desire to become better because every child comes “wired” with the desire to be excellent.

The proposition is straightforward. If we understand the pervasive influence and power of spirit in human life, then it becomes clear and evident as to why “touching the spirit” must be the “starting point for all learning,” as well as the corrective for all educational underachievement and the impetus for learning acceleration and teacher professional development.

Technically, education is both “the formal and informal process wherein a people rationally guide and systematically guarantee *the reproduction and refinement of the best of themselves.*” Education fundamentally consists of process, pedagogy and product. Hence, the ultimate question becomes, how do we educate (reproduce and refine) African children to become authentic human beings? True and powerful education is caught in that instant that becomes a moment that turns into a path of perfection. It is when the teacher “*touches the spirit*” of the student and opens up the passion for knowledge and inspires the student to love learning. In reproducing and refining the best of ourselves, both the intent and content of the educational process must be captured in a pedagogy that inspires (in spirits) excellence and results in an authentic sense of personhood, an affirmed sense of purpose, and an assured sense of power. It is this central idea about true and powerful education that has driven our reclaiming and re-inventing the African centered pedagogy and process for educational excellence with African American children that we are calling the Nsaka Sunsum (Touching the Spirit).

### **The Language and Logic of Nsaka Sunsum**

If one examines those educational instances, efforts or results (i.e., the Hamilton Nakis, Vivian Thomases and Ben Carsons of the Black world) one would find, I believe, that the binding or common core feature is touching the spirit. Educational excellence in every form is the direct and indirect result of a teacher touching the spirit of a child and in so doing inspiring them to go beyond the perceived limit to achieve a higher level of functioning. What is needed, however, is the binding language and logic that denotes Black educational excellence and allows and assists in the recognition and replication of the process.

The esoteric logic of the Nsaka Sunsum (Touching the Spirit) educational pedagogy and process is captured in the interdependent meshing of African intuition (the voice of the spirit), consciousness (the voice of the ancestors), and information (the voice of experience). The idea of the “voice of the spirit,” as part of the logic of education, is difficult for most people to openly acknowledge. However, its components, “imagination” or personal creativity and “sensitivity” or emotional connectivity are fundamental to the learning process. Similarly, viewing consciousness as the voice of the ancestors is especially difficult. However, in African traditions dreams and impressions are viewed as messages by which the ancestors are constantly guiding and protecting us. Is there not a critical role for moving from the unknown to the known or

inventing a new idea or thought in the educational process? Where do these inventive ideas come from? What is the source of a child “dreaming” of becoming something great or achieving high honor, especially in a society of degradation and denigration? Could it be the guiding voice of the ancestors? Finally, information as the voice of experience is a fundamental part of the logic of Nsaka Sunsum. Complete experience is, however, not just the experience of current events but includes a comprehension of our historical past and future occasions. The voice of experience also includes our ancestral memory as an apperceptive mass and psychogenetic linking of information and universal vibrations as all our sensory and extra-sensory perceptions. Hence, the formal principles of the Nsaka Sunsum and, I would argue every other example of Black educational excellence, are spirit driven intuition, consciousness and information. Operationally, the combining of these esoteric notions expresses themselves as three legs or pedagogical ideas. The three Key *NSAKA SUNSUM* pedagogical ideas are (1) Love (the undeniable desire of one’s spirit to connect, merge, extend and to expand into a greater oneness with another (spirit); (2) Culture (the critical milieu without which human life can not develop or exist. It is represented as the vast structure of behaviors, ideas, attitudes, values, habits, beliefs, customs, language, rituals ceremonies and practices “*peculiar to a particular group of people and which provides them with a general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality*”; and (3) Education (the process whereby humans both formally and informally *reproduce and refine the best of themselves* by guiding the student to human mastery, perfectibility and excellence). One cannot attain true and powerful education with African American children without allowing or even demanding that one’s own spirit merge, extend into, and expand with the spirit of the child. Nor can one educate Black children if the teaching and learning process is not guided by our design for living and patterns for interpreting our reality and the overall process does not consciously recognize and reflect the goal of reproducing and refining the essential being of Black children.

The language associated with the tested process, intent and method of the Nsaka Sunsum (Touching the Spirit) educational pedagogy and process are as follows: The 4 M’s of Intent: (1) Mastery, (2) Majesty, (3) Memory, and (4) Meaning; the 5 R’s of Method: (1) Relationship(s), (2) Ritual, (3) Recitation, (4) Repetition, and (5) Rhythm; and the 6 Supportive Practices: (1) Igniting the Inner Genius, (2) Divine Dancing, (3) Learning Gumbo, (4) Expressive Personhood, (5) Rhythmic Reinforcement, and (6) Sensory (auditory) Learning Enhancement.

In the language of the Nsaka Sunsum Intent, there is exact intentionality on the part of the teacher to engage in majesty, mastery, memory and meaning. With “Majesty” the teacher’s educational intent is to establish dignity, authority, connection, power and splendor between the teacher and the student. Classroom teachers’ engagement in majesty in the classroom must be a resolute behavior. It is a resolute behavior because the teachers must first see majesty within themselves. In a fundamental sense, majesty is having an intrinsic power, authority and worth or value. It is best seen as dignity or being dignified. One can actually identify teachers who know they have “majesty.” What many don’t consciously know is that by touching the spirit they can intentionally transfer their majesty to their students. Once teachers know that their majesty is transferable, it becomes important they see it in their students. Majesty is, therefore, the desire of teachers to inspire in their students all that is great in them at all times. The purpose of education is to reproduce and refine all that is the best of society. In many ways, majesty occurs when the teacher believes that the greatness that is within them by virtue of being a teacher must be

reproduced and refined in each and every student. As a teacher one must connect oneself to each child, in part, through the demonstration of one's own dignity, authority, connection, power and splendor. This connection is evident in the classroom by the teacher upholding a high level of professionalism and excellence in their attitude, dress and mannerisms; a high level of respect for each child and their cultural capital, a high level of expectation that every child can achieve success in the same or greater fashion than the teacher h/erself and the staunch belief that the teacher is an important role model that is to be reproduced and refined. The teacher, therefore, must be of good character to be replicated and emulated.

Administrators, school boards, teacher's unions, parents, and community leaders (presumably of good character) must hold teachers accountable for their sense of excellence and character. A teacher of questionable character should not be offered the gift of being able to influence, direct and guide any child's life. A teacher of questionable character is one who takes no responsibility for their own teaching and the learning of students. S/he blames the students, their parents, their culture or any other viable scapegoat to rationalize their failure to be committed to relentlessly working on the behalf of children.

This can be witnessed in the teacher's lounge, on the playground, or in the back of the classroom where some African American child ultimately will be sitting as punishment for the teacher's lack of preparation and/or inability to purposefully challenge that child to maximize h/er greatness.

With "Mastery" the teacher's educational intent is to assist the student to continually seek to possess and attain a higher level of skill, knowledge, technique and proficiency regarding a subject. Teaching is happening... learning is not! What is the disconnection? On any given day a person can walk through a school and witness teachers doing something called teaching. The teacher is usually in front of a classroom teaching the curriculum provided by the district. According to some district guidelines, teachers in many schools should be on approximately the same page of their teachers' guides at the same time. Furthermore, teachers in many schools must give assessments to students on Friday after the lessons have been taught during the week. On Friday many students nationwide fail the assessments. A teacher of questionable character might say "I taught it" and move on to the next week's assessment preparation in the name of lesson plans. Is teaching really happening here?

Mastery must be the goal and the only indication of teaching in a classroom. Teaching is not synonymous with learning. Simply teaching the skill, knowledge or technique is not good enough. Teachers have been allowed through district mandates to continue with the curriculum guides and the district pacing schedules while the children continuously are allowed to fail. The proof of excellence in teaching is detected in the success of the performance of students. Teachers must remember that teaching and learning are bound together as a divine dance. Excellent teaching is evident in classrooms where the teacher can discern between what works and what does not and has no resistance to changing the plans or the methods of instruction to better benefit the learning style of the child. Mastery occurs when the teacher takes ownership of each child's repertoire of knowledge and defines and enhances it by any means necessary. Mastery as the teacher's educational intent must be as rigorous and as serious as the process for

electing the pope. Several cardinals are selected to elect the pope. They enter in a conclave where they will remain until a new pope is selected. Once the new pope has been chosen, white smoke is sent up a chimney to alert the world that a new pope has been chosen. The cardinals intent is to carefully and wisely choose who the next pope will be. The Catholic view in this vein is that they don't leave until the smoke is white. Teachers must have the same vision in their intent to teach children for mastery. In other words, teachers don't leave until the smoke is white or teachers should not stop until the student has proven that s/he has achieved mastery.

Administrators have a considerable role in the responsibility for students' lack of mastery of skills and knowledge. Administrators must hold teachers accountable when students do not master a subject. However, district and school administrators must first examine the role that they play in creating policies that allow ineffective teachers to remain in the classroom. When analyzing the test scores and outcomes of the various high stakes assessments, the variables examined are typically the race, gender, and socio-economic status of the child. The most glaring data is that African American males fail more than any other group. African American males are also suspended more than any other group, drop out of school more than any other race, and are imprisoned at a greater rate than any other group. Administrators should be remiss for not including a comparative analysis of the race, gender, educational preparedness and years of experience of the teachers in their results diagrams. The results of the teachers race, gender, educational preparedness and years of teaching should be weighed in as factors that often prevent students from achieving mastery of skills and knowledge. A critical concern or question should be what type of teacher is better able to "touch the spirit" of Black male students?

One example of accountability in this regard could be as follows: Each year the success rate of the teacher should be critically examined. If 50% of the students in a classroom achieve below average on the standardized test variety of the year or week, the teacher should be given a well-publicized score of 50% or a grade of an "F". If the teacher teaches to mastery 70 percent of the students in their class, they should receive a grade of 70%, equal to a "C". If the teacher achieves mastery in 100 percent of her students, she receives a grade of an "A" and she receives a raise in her teacher salary. High stakes testing<sup>7</sup> should be based upon the success and performance of the teacher and the student in the classroom and not on over-assessing students.

Imagine the effort and innovation that would be developed in the field of education if the ability of teachers to achieve a high level of mastery in their students was rewarded in the same fashion as successful doctors and lawyers. Teachers must be held accountable as well as students who remain victimized by a system of educational practices and policies that continue to perpetuate failure. Never should students who have shown ample evidence of low performance on assessments be assessed more, unless we can invent an assessment process or instrument that in itself "touches the spirit" of the student and thereby assists in the achievement of mastery. The intervention for students must include the Nsaka Sunsum pedagogical ideas of love, culture and education--not more assessments. When teachers are found to be deficient in their ability to facilitate mastery of skills and knowledge in their students, the teachers' ability to perform must be reconsidered and their contract must either be remanded to a probationary status pending Nsaka Sunsum training or the teacher must be immediately terminated from the teaching

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<sup>7</sup> The only benefit of high stakes testing is the financial gain of the companies who sell the testing materials and the confirmation for many racists intent on perpetuating the lie that African Americans are intellectually inferior .

profession. The seriousness of the failure of school systems across the country to achieve educational excellence with Black children demands no less.

With “Memory” the teacher’s educational intent is symbolically connecting learning to the heart. The educational intent is to blend the knower with both knowledge and the process of knowing. To “learn by heart” is to connect the student and the learning into one organic being. Memory can be observed in the classroom when teachers make students understand their connection to what they learn. An excellent example of memory is when teachers have their students perform on stage or in front of their classmates. The teacher will give their student lines to learn and memorize. But it is more than simple memorization. Through memory the intent is for the child to become one with the subject matter or learning task. It takes a truly gifted teacher to see the value of these types of assignments, to understand the importance and to put forth the effort to complete the task. The students, with the help of their teacher, or their family, or their friends will spend an enormous amount of time rehearsing the lines and committing them to memory. Within this task, many skills are developed and mastered and the symbolism of learning to the heart is outlined. Through this one assignment, the student learns to respect himself and others as he understands the effort required on everyone’s part to complete the task. Shyness is often eliminated, while courage, confidence and competence are developed and strengthened. Others encourage fellow classmates when they might have previously been teased in other venues. The student becomes one with the assignment and anticipates with pride its completion.

This task of memorization for a performance has touched issues of respect, courage, pride, collectivism, effort and hard work. Certainly other issues will be explored during the completion of the assignment. This example of a school performance is valuable in highlighting factors relating to learning to the heart. The issues explored during this assignment are characteristics that must be developed in the citizens in our society. These characteristics and others can be developed in school performances through memorization connection to learning. Other academic areas benefit from the development of mnemonic devices that aid in memory including studying, class work, and the ability of the brain to retain information.

The assignment of an activity such as a school play can be supported by the administration of the school by a requirement that all grades will participate in the school play or memorization performance. For example, with the educational intent to connect learning to the heart students who have been prepared by their teachers can host morning or weekly assemblies. These students have taken ownership and pride in their role in the successful orchestration of the morning or weekly assembly. Memory as the educational intent can also be seen in schools where administration and staff have developed or school songs, rally calls or inspirational learning chants that serve to unify students, develop pride in themselves or the school.

Students have great abilities that are often stifled or never showcased because some teachers don’t look for the greatness in the student. Many schools have assemblies where the students are required to memorize their parts and perform in front of large audiences. This assignment of memorization for public performance has changed in many ways. Often the teachers have no control of their classroom and would not dare to endeavor on such an arduous task and their students are never given an opportunity to relate learning to the heart. In an effort to conform to the idea that schools should have students perform for whatever reason, or season, many schools

allow students to perform using notes on paper or have their parts posted in different places through the audience. Performance without memorization (or simply learning lines) does not meet the educational intent of memory which is to develop a connection to the student and the learning and connect the student and learning into one organic whole; i.e., to blend the student (knower) to the subject (knowledge) and to the process of learning (knowing).

And finally, with “Meaning” the teacher’s educational intent is to assist the student in being able to uncover or discover the deeper significance, importance and relevance of the information and ideas representing learning. The teacher’s role is to guide students through a series of topic-related questions especially concerning the colonization of ideas. The questions probe the multi-layered nature reality. This is especially important in the context of the falsification or omission of our contributions to every area of human endeavor. Such a procedure helps students to respond by making connections on personal, textual, and worldly levels. As a result of this “divine dance” students are able to identify with the content matter. Through this process students and teachers realize that there is a deeper meaning underlying everything. For example, in teaching a unit on archeoastronomy, meaning would guide the teacher to further interrogate the subject by exploring why some information (African contributions) is never discussed or is distorted. Meaning compels the teacher to guide the students’ knowing to a deeper level; i.e., not only why the astronomical history of the Dogon gets left out of the text but also how did the Dogon know about certain astronomical configurations without the aid of a modern telescope.

In the language of the Nsaka Sunsum Method, Ritual is a teaching method that involves the whole person (thinking, feeling and doing) in development and transformation. Stress is placed on performance (doing) and affirmation (recognition). Rhythm is a teaching method that is vitalistic (requires action, movement, sound and speech) and locates knowledge, knowing and knower as a "Divine Dance" between the teacher and the student. Recitation is a teaching method that utilizes the recognition of the spoken word and sound patterns to assist in the internalization of learning. Stress is placed on oral and aural virtuosity. Repetition is a teaching method that utilizes the "dramatic pulse" found in progress and progression as tempo. Stress is placed on movement and meter as a stimulus for achievement. Repetition of pattern enhances meaning and learning. Relationship is a teaching method that utilizes the recognition of connections. Based on the recognition of the simultaneous connection between the being, belonging and becoming of the student and teacher, the primary source of student-teacher relationship is love and respect. Stress is placed on making connections between the students’ multiple worlds (home, school, church, community, etc.) and the usefulness of learning. In the language of the Nsaka Sunsum Method, Ritual is a teaching method that involves the whole person (thinking, feeling and doing) in development and transformation. Stress is placed on performance (doing) and affirmation (recognition). Rhythm is a teaching method that is vitalistic (requires action, movement, sound and speech) and locates knowledge, knowing and knower as a "Divine Dance" between the teacher and the student. Recitation is a teaching method that utilizes the recognition of the spoken word and sound patterns to assist in the internalization of learning. Stress is placed on oral and aural virtuosity. Repetition is a teaching method that utilizes the "dramatic pulse" found in progress and progression as tempo. Stress is placed on movement and meter as a stimulus for achievement. Repetition of pattern enhances meaning and learning. Relationship is a teaching method that utilizes the recognition of connections. Based on the recognition of the

simultaneous connection between the being, belonging and becoming of the student and teacher, the primary source of student-teacher relationship is love and respect. Stress is placed on making connections between the students' multiple worlds (home, school, church, community, etc.) and the usefulness of learning.

In the language of the Nsaka Sunsum Process, one is required to develop teaching strategies or practices that are consciously designed to "touch the spirit". There are no set approved techniques. The only requirement is that the technique touches the spirit. The following are, however, examples that have been used in the professional development training of teachers for the last decade.

1. Igniting the Inner Genius. With this practice the teacher affirms that h/er students are the "greatest", can master anything and complete any task or assignment at the level of excellence. High praise is continually used to prepare or "prime" the student's readiness. In so doing there is continual touching of the spirit and reminding the student of their personal ownership of the spirit of excellence. In my own classroom and in those of teachers who worked well with our children this was achieved by the teacher first understanding that they possess the power to create the climate of the classroom. The teacher reminds the student of their success and continuously raises the standard. The teacher creates an atmosphere for success by helping students to become fearless. The teacher shows the students that taking risks is acceptable. The gifted teacher begins to "hand off"<sup>8</sup> responsibility for the learning to the students. The students are able to articulate what is expected of them, the expectations are known, stated and can be repeated by the students. The students take possession of their learning and become resources for each other in different subjects and on different projects.
1. Divine Dancing. With this practice the teacher moves (dances) among students, creates active physical harmony, lively exciting and stimulating environment, and encourages active participatory learning. In so doing a learning relationship is the constant and expected relationship between the teacher's spirit and the student's spirit. Evidence that the teaching process reflects and or incorporates Divine Dancing in the classroom is seen in the pace of instruction. Instruction should be quick, spirited, and lively. The teacher moves among the students and creates active physical harmony in an intense and stimulating environment. The students rise to the challenge of the intense pace with excitement and confidence because it has been created in the lively and congenial interactions between the teacher and the students.
1. Learning Gumbo. With this practice the student's spirit is "touched" by the teacher, reinforcing in each classroom a passion for learning and a desire to know. The teacher

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<sup>8</sup> An example of "handing off" in regard to igniting the inner genius is when the teacher has successfully moved (ignited) the students "to the point where their knowledge, desire and thirst for information is so rigorous that they cannot wait for the teacher to instruct them and are making inquiries of their own. "Hand-off" is not to mean that the teacher gives the responsibility for learning to the students by giving students assignments and expecting them to complete them without guidance or instruction.

“mixes” strong praise, high expectations and continuous challenges. In classrooms where teachers are successful with African American students there is a mutual respect evident in the classroom discourse and in non-verbal indicators. The teacher and the students routinely make connections between and among the physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural realms of their lives and why they are learning what they are learning. Stress is placed on making connections or relations between the students’ multiple worlds of home, school, church, family community etc. and the usefulness of learning. The teacher introduces the lesson with an explanation of the whole idea and then develops the parts.

1. Expressive Personhood. With this practice the teacher consciously integrates the student’s personal feelings, thoughts and actions. The teacher openly encourages, which in most cases is discouraged or eliminated, the unique and distinctive learning styles and language (Ebonics) of the student. This practice of expressive personhood can be achieved in the classroom by stressing oral, aural, visual, tactile and movement virtuosity. The students are encouraged to speak and express themselves confidently. The teacher has refined and developed her relationships with the student so that they know significant attributes that are unique to each other. The students know and understand why the teacher has high expectations of them and what the expectations are. The classroom décor reflects the culture, race and ethnicity of all of the students in the room. The unique learning modalities and attributes of each learner are not only encouraged but the teacher uses and honors the students’ learning modalities and attributes to inform instruction.

1. Rhythmic Reinforcement. Teacher continuously affirms that the student already knows many things and in most instances comes to school with a first language. Rhyming helps to stimulate the spirit in learning as well as internalizing the reinforcement that the student’s nature is to be a knower. In classrooms, teachers use rhythm and rhyming through music or sounds to reinforce what is being learned. Common uses of rhythm reinforcement are the clapping of hands to indicate syllable breaks in words, or teachers creating songs that reinforce or remind students of the lessons they have learned. Repetition is also a method used widely in classrooms. The rhythm of the repetition of skills or facts helps to reinforce what is known.

1. Sensory (auditory) learning Enhancement. With this practice the teacher intentionally creates an active and noisy learning environment. That is, the teacher should create a learning environment that is multi-sensory (sound, sight, touch, movement) and surrounds and/or encapsulates the process of learning. Use of background ambiance (sound, especially music) is desirable. Background music is often played to create an ambiance where the rhythm is ever present. Effective and dedicated teachers have taken popular songs or rhythms of current popular music and recreated lyrics that represent a new song to the sound of the popular music. This practice can even be assigned to students as a class activity that would aid in the internalizing of a theme or the memorization of a literary piece.

In effect, the *Nsaka Sunsum: Touching the Spirit* is a revolutionary educational process that realigns the educational intent, method, practices and cultural applications in the service of

maximizing the student's educational potential. It boldly utilizes the best of African and African American culture in the achievement of educational excellence with African American students. It also provides Black education with a language and logic that substantiates and legitimizes Black educational excellence on and within our own cultural grounding.

## **African (Black) Psychology: Implications for Pedagogical Practice via the Nsaka Sunsum**

The final point I wish to draw attention to in this discussion is the nexus between African (Black) psychology, the Nsaka Sunsum and African-centered pedagogical practice. Generally, the educational experiences or objectives for teachers of African American learners should support the overall development and transformation of the child. Specifically, African-centered instruction should focus on the development of the African spirit, mind and being and the intellectual and cultural maturation of the child. The ultimate test of African-centered education is the extent to which the teaching and learning experience reflects and/or fosters African and African-American cultural worldview, precepts and values. The purpose of the educational experience should be to respect and reinforce the spiritual evolution and cultural maturation of children in harmony with their own existence, family and community. The content of the educational experience should reflect the image, interest and development of African American children.

The core or essential aspects of the ABPsi definition of African-centered psychology is the “illumination and liberation of the spirit in the service of promoting optimal human functioning”. Accordingly, the application of African-centered psychology to Black educational excellence requires the recognition that

1. Spirit permeates everything
2. Everything in the universe is interconnected
3. Collectivity is the most salient element of existence
4. Communal self knowledge is key to mental health

Given this nexus between African (Black) Psychology and Black educational excellence, the essential conditions necessary for effective instruction for African American learners can be stated in the form of four “Nsaka Sunsum” postulates.

*Nsaka Sunsum* Postulate I “Every child not only can learn but can learn anything and everything.” (Spirit permeates everything)

*Nsaka Sunsum* Postulate II “Knowledge, knowing and knower are interconnected and must always be connected for optimal learning acquisition to occur.” (Everything in the universe is interconnected)

*Nsaka Sunsum* Postulate III “The value of individual achievement is directly related to one’s ability to contribute to the well-being and welfare of one’s community and the human family.” (Collectivity is the most salient element of existence)

*Nsaka Sunsum* Postulate IV “Education must inextricably link the student’s and community’s well-being and welfare and by so doing provide the student with the attitude, ability, and willingness to contribute to their own as well as other human fulfillment.” (Communal self knowledge is key to mental health)

**Nsaka Sunsum Curricular components:** Curriculum is generally thought of as a set of activities, courses and/or instruction bound by an area of specialization. Its essential components are (1) objectives, (2) content, (3) intent, (4) process and (5) outcomes.

Technically speaking, therefore, the *Nsaka Sunsum* (Touching the Spirit) curriculum would be a course of study whose purpose is to (1) systematically guide the transmission of information and knowledge; (2) reinforce the desire (passion) to learn/know; (3) encourage the internalization of behavior and/or attitudes consistent with educational excellence, human mastery and the development of character as defined by African people over the centuries (Nobles, 1991a, 1991b).

Curricular Objectives: In its objectives, the *Nsaka Sunsum* (Touching the Spirit) curriculum supports the development of a sense of consciousness, confidence, competence, commitment, and character in the student. Accordingly, the overall objective is to guide the development of a well-rounded human being who has the ability, skills and attitude to become a contributing asset to self, family, community, and society. The curriculum for African American students should guide educational activities designed to excite the students, provide them opportunities to acquire new skills, knowledge, and practices, and enable them to intellectually believe as well as experientially feel that there are things that they can do well. In the doing of these things, they can benefit themselves, family, community and society. The educational objectives associated with this curriculum are also guided by the conscious attempt to incorporate and utilize methods and practices consistent with African cultural retentions, orientations and precepts (e.g. real world applications, responsibility for traditions, harmony with nature, cooperation and synergy) to stimulate educational excellence.

Curricular Intent: The intent of the *Nsaka Sunsum* (Touching the Spirit) curriculum is to openly assist children in (1) achieving mastery of all aspects of human functioning; (2) reproduce and refine themselves in the objective world; and (3) make explicit their personality and character. By providing the student with opportunities to experience success, and to see their own image and interest in the educational experience, the curriculum is intentionally orchestrated to develop a sense of competence, confidence, and consciousness in the student. The intention of the curriculum is guided by the conscious attempt to incorporate and utilize cultural retentions, orientations, and precepts of African American people (e.g. high spiritual/ethical concerns, veneration of the ancestors, sociology of selfhood/communalism, unity of being, centrality of

community/collectivism, consubstantiation and transformation) to stimulate educational excellence.

Curricular Content: The Nsaka Sunsum (Touching the Spirit) curriculum is guided by the conscious attempt to include African and African American contributions to human civilization in every subject area while utilizing and integrating subject specific concepts and skills, critical thinking and problem solving. It should be designed to enable youths to perceive and understand principles like reciprocity, responsibility, restraint, and respect. The content of the program should serve to develop a consciousness of the interconnectedness between man, nature, and the supernatural. It should systematically guide the transmission of information and knowledge while simultaneously reinforcing the desire to learn.

Teaching Process: The educator is “the bridge.” It is the teacher’s job to make the curriculum come alive. The teacher must carry the complex and technical information supporting human growth and development to the life and mind of the student. The teacher must be able to translate or exchange the information and the curricular content to meanings, experiences and applications that the student can use and understand. The educational process for African American students utilizing an Nsaka Sunsum (Touching the Spirit) curriculum would also be guided by the conscious attempt to incorporate and utilize methods and practices consistent with cultural retentions, orientations and precepts (e.g. performance-demonstration, dramatization, verve/emotional vitality, harmony, movement, affect, expressive individualism, orality, interdependence/interrelatedness, and direct experience) to stimulate educational excellence.

Curricular Outcomes: While each subject area will identify the specific outcomes associated with the course of study (i.e. what students should know), the overall outcome for African American students utilizing the Nsaka Sunsum (Touching the Spirit) curriculum should be the reproduction and refinement of a competent, confident and conscious human being.

The Teacher- Jegnoch: Several years ago I introduced the notion of Jegna (plural of Jegna) to the African- centered discourse (Nobles, 2002). At that time, I offered Jegna as a better and more appropriate model for youth advising than the Greek notion of Mentor. It is clearer to me now that the characteristics of a Jegna are, in deed, essentially the qualities we see in our best teachers. Jegnoch are those special people who have (1) been tested in struggle or battle (2) demonstrated extraordinary and unusual fearlessness; (3) shown determination and courage in protecting his/her people, land, and culture; (4) shown diligence and dedication to our people; (5) produced exceptionally high quality work; (6) dedicated themselves to the protection, defense, nurturance and development of our young by advancing our people, place and culture, The teachers who are successful in guiding Black children to achieve educational excellence are also those teachers who oppose the systems of Black negation and mediocrity (tested in struggle or battle). They are the ones who work beyond their contract or class period (diligence and dedication to our people). They fight for – sometimes against - parents and principals to insure their students’ success (dedicate themselves to the protection, defense, nurturance and development of our young). They produce children who perform at the highest level (produce exceptionally high quality work). Nsaka Sunsum Teachers or Spirit teachers do more than just teach subject matter competencies. They build and inspire the character of excellence wherein

our children have the confidence to meet the challenges of mastery. Our best teachers are Jegnoch.

## **Our Charge and Challenge**

Educational practice should be both an art and a science with African (Black) psychology providing the logical formulation of its process. Given the cultural grounding of all educational programming, African (Black) psychology should serve Black education by dissecting the inadequate and useless ineptness of most Western models of education and explicate in great detail the appropriate African centered cultural formulations for Black educational excellence. In recognition, for instance, that the axiom, “*Nothing human happens outside of culture*” and its corollary, “*Culture is the medium in which all human functioning occurs,*” African (Black) Psychology should be charged with the task of providing the critical analyses of both Black educational failure and success. Similarly, since it is recognized that in relation to human functioning, culture performs a “symbolic function” wherein it provides the set or sets of signs, symbols, beliefs, rituals, and rites which give meaning to human phenomena and the logical relations between and amongst phenomena as well as a “demand function” having the power to compel behaviors and the capacity to reinforce ideas and beliefs about human activity, African (Black) psychology and psychologists are or should be essential in furthering our understanding of the complex symbolic and demand function of culture in relation to Black education and excellence.

In a straightforward way, the charge and challenge for African (Black) Psychology and psychologists is to relocate the discourse on Black human functioning and to engage in the process of defining the meaning of being human for all African people. In so doing, the charge and challenge for African (Black) psychology is to (1) “clarify” our definition, meaning and resolute position/purpose in the world; (2) “analyze and describe” the concrete human conditions which affect and influence our collective human development; (3) “prescribe and excite” solutions and actions which will free African people from both material and spiritual degradation; and (4) re-claim and re-invent methods and models of African-centered habilitation and rehabilitation in the real world.

Similarly, the charge and challenge of the classroom teacher is to blend the art and science of African-centered teaching where teaching is inextricably married to educational excellence. In many ways, we classroom teachers should be the catalyst that prescribes and excites educational excellence with Black children. Our role and responsibility is to be the Jegnoch.

Our children and the ancestors expect us, African (black) classroom teachers to

- (1) Define and understand the magnitude of the role that they play in shaping the lives of children and therefore,
- (2) Be of exalted character to serve as a role model for students, parents and the community.
- (3) Realize that via your role as a teacher, it is your responsibility to heal the community through educational excellence.
- (4) Be willing and prepared to fight racism, White supremacy, and African dehumanization by questioning, analyzing, refuting, refusing or rewriting any policy or practice that does not have the best interest of the black child in mind as if that child was of your own flesh.

- (5) Understand that your love for the spirit of the human being in your classroom will be one of the most important guiding forces in that child's life.

The role of a Black classroom teacher is vastly different from that of any other. As a result of racism, White supremacy, and African dehumanization, the African American child has been saddled with the legacy of an educational system that was created to perpetuate their failure. It is then the role, right and responsibility of the African classroom teacher to protect black children by destroying the system that has no regard for the African meaning of being human.

The legacies of excellence of Hamilton Naki, Vivian Thomas, and Ben Carson will only become commonplace when the structure and process of education has been organized to include love, culture and the reproduction and refinement of the best of our being so that high regard for Black people and our culture permeates through the educational system and a deep respect for the potential of excellence in Black children is developed.

African communities both in Africa and the Diaspora (including the USA), it seems to me, require and expect us, African (Black) psychologists to firstly ignite our own cultural sense of spiritness and to continue to think, conceptualize and produce ideas, thoughts, programs and projects that liberate and illuminate the spirit of African people world-wide. Accordingly, we must dare "to be African" and create conditions and circumstances where we re-claim, re-invent, test and replicate models that reflect as well as ignite the best possibility and potential of African people.

In a very real sense, the Nsaka Sunsum Pedagogy and Process for Educational Excellence with African American children is but one attempt to harness our own culture so as to utilize the notion of spiritness as the key to explicating the logical relationship between teacher and student that compels achievement, reinforces the student's belief in their own unlimited capacity and results in educational excellence. The ultimate charge for African (Black) Psychology and Psychologists is to engage every area (religion, economics, entertainment, family, etc.) of Black life in the same manner. Finally, in the spirit of spiritness the charge and challenge of African (Black) psychologists is to fulfill our destiny. The key is to know who we are and whose we are.

Our children (including those yet-to-be born) and the ancestors (whose unfulfilled possibilities we are) should expect no less than that we who are the seekers of the illumination (Black Psychologists) and who are given custody of Black children's learning (Black Teachers) develop and insist upon an educational practice that will Touch the Spirit of excellence and elegance in Black Children. In doing Nsaka Sunsum, we can ignite and/or re-instill in all of us the commitment to continue the tradition of Black excellence, mastery, and building for eternity.

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