

CHAPTER ONE

THE WRONG FRAMES FOR THE RIGHT PROBLEM

What manner of education will provide African-Americans with the voice to sing the scared liturgy of their own culture? What manner of education will mold the African personality to thrive in a culture that demeaned its character, denied its existence and coordinated in its destruction? How shall we sing our sacred song in a strange land? This is the fundamental contradiction that stands before African-centered pedagogy in the United States.

—Carol D. Lee, *African-Centered Pedagogy:
Complexities and Possibilities*

Schooling is a process intended to perpetuate and maintain the society's existing power relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements. Education, in contrast to schooling, is the process of transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge of the values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs, and all things that give a particular cultural orientation its uniqueness.

—Mwalimu Shujaa

Writing this book has been, in a sense, a journey home. It has been a process of coming to a deep sense of quality education from a belated (but intentional) rediscovery of African American intellectual and cultural traditions. Who I am as an educator is a reflection of the wisdom and educational experience of my mother and father. Who I am as an educator is, therefore, also a reflection of the struggles of my parents to get an education. My mother grew up and

attended public school in the urban north in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My father grew up and attended public school in Glasgow, Kentucky. Both came up in the era of segregation and their respective experiences epitomize the two metaphors of Black achievement in a northern industrial setting and a southern, small town segregated setting. The contrast of experiences in a Jim Crow southern town and a larger northern industrial city is key in the construction of who I am as an educator.

It is a coming of age as an African American educator—first as a high school teacher, then as a community college instructor, and finally as a university professor—that I experienced a gradual rekindling of a truly Africanist conception of Black education. Preparing this book was the realization of a sojourn away from a northern, culturally mainstream education with no cultural Black presence—indeed, no Black people for the most part (I did not have a Black teacher until graduate school). That sojourn was toward truly African-centered educational practice through the cultural ways of African Americans as represented in the southern roots of my parents and kin. The sojourn is one of coming to cultural ways of African Americans as the progeny of a northern school system entering the figured world of southern Black educational traditions.

My first inklings that there was a rich cultural integrity to African American perspective on education was in an African American Baptist Church and the experience of learning in Sunday School and the comparisons to public school. The congregation, probably the oldest in Milwaukee at that time, was constituted almost entirely of recent émigrés from Arkansas, Mississippi, and other southern states. The Sunday school teachers were not professionally trained teachers. Their approach to teaching the “text of the day” would probably elicit criticism from professional educators regarding ways of improving their “delivery of the content.” Despite whatever they lacked in formal teacher training, the experience of the “lesson” from these Sunday school teachers was noticeably richer than anything I experienced in the public school. At the time I really noticed the this richness of meaning—I really thought about the text and its meaning—something I did much less well in school.

The public school I attended was all White. My sister and I were the first African American children to attend the school. I started in kindergarten and my sister in third grade. I noticed, even at this young age, the contrast in my Sunday school experience to the then highly regarded elementary school. The school was bright and well-resourced with the best teachers. The rooms were spacious, the books new, and the materials plentiful. In contrast, the church basement was dark and smelled of mildew in the damp corners serving as the storage areas. It seemed decidedly unlike school: The set up was a series of metal folding chairs in one of four partitions in the basement, rudely cordoned off with old blackboards. The “classrooms” of Sunday school were made thus.

In place of new books there were pamphlets containing the day's lesson that we often had to share with a partner. The pamphlets contained a parable for us to read, discuss, and link to scripture.

Despite the stark physical differences, I had a sense that the more powerful learning experience was taking place in the Black Baptist Church. Despite my child's preference for the bright, spacious classroom of my public school, I was powerfully drawn to the literacy learning experience in Sunday school. Even at that young age, I understood that the difference was not a matter of teaching expertise, *per se*. One experience seemed real and the other did not. By real, I mean *in the world*—a glimpse of the panorama of human conditions, such as it was in Milwaukee in the 1950s and 1960s. Most importantly, keenly aware as I was of race, it seemed more real in that it was context of Black doings—activity on learning, development, spiritual renewal, and communion. My daily experience in public school, by contrast, was characterized by an implacable negotiation of place—a safe place unassailed by the constant indignities of racism. Both seemed to me microcosms of the “real world” beyond the home and family. Both seemed to hold out challenges to me for belonging and becoming. But only one seemed real in the authenticity of human values and human struggle toward those values. Only one seemed like the home to which I had never been.

Two major themes of the Black cultural experience that are central to education—double vision/consciousness and resistance through which achievement is realized. In my two figured worlds (see Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, pp. 41–42)—the African American Sunday School and the racially homogeneous public school—these themes were transfigured in different ways. The African American figured world was a context that aided the resolution of my identity conflicts, and gave greater meaning to the struggle. The white, public school figured world did just the reverse: it shut down any expectations I had that it would ever deal with what mattered to me and my people. The irony though, is that the contrast between the two worlds helped resolve the dual-consciousness dilemma enough to achieve academically. It was the contrast that proved to be an important stimulus to my growth and development, and much of it had to do with finding an identity I could live with. As the only Black student in your cohort, you get to be the exception. You get to be the “credit to your race” and forever labor under the responsibility of being a good representative for Black people—to be a model and emissary to white people who otherwise had not had exposure to anyone unlike themselves.

Let me pose a couple of questions to readers at this point to focus your reflection on the significance of this experience. Have you ever had to be an emissary for your race? Have you ever been given cause to even think about

your race in the context of school? What is it like for children who labor under an emissary identity (for an excellent treatment of these questions, see Garrod, Ward, Robinson, & Kilkenny, 1999). For me, the resolution of the two central themes in African American educational experience—resistance to assaults on my African American identity and the dilemma of belonging due to the double-consciousness DuBois described—was through academic achievement. This was the perfect adaptation for an African American student in all-White school situations. Knowing that the full and authentic membership among groups of white, working-class German and Polish children was unlikely, it was a source of comfort to have a position to occupy on the periphery as “one of the good ones”—position legitimated by the “good Negro syndrome.”

Academic achievement allowed me to occupy the role of “the exception” in the face of virulent racism. I found relative safety in the role of the “credit to my race” but labored under the responsibility of being a “good representative for Black people”—the model and emissary to white people who otherwise had not exposure to Black people. In my first year of teaching in an all-Black junior-senior high school, I began taking graduate courses in educational psychology, counseling psychology, school psychology, and anything that would provide me a greater understanding and expertise. I placed my faith in the educational system despite my growing skepticism that it simply did not work for African Americans as a whole people. I remember thinking that if I could just find the right course that would put it all together, my faith in education as the great equalizer could be restored.

I entered graduate school in school psychology right around the time of the famous *Wilson Riles v. the State of California*, a court case in which the use of IQ tests to place African American children in special education classes was contested by a class action lawsuit. Upon understanding more profoundly the role of school psychologists in the proliferation of the American system of sort-and-select, I changed programs and entered counseling psychology. Here again was a litany of courses that seemed to provide studies and theories and frameworks that merely supported the obvious, but addressed not at all the persistent underachievement of African American students in public schools.

Gradually I found that the most significant lessons that supported my success as a teacher did not come from schooling, but from an understanding of African American people, culture, and history. Gradually I understood that effective work with the people public schooling serves least well is absolutely the right problem. My educational career since my early days of teaching has been, in various forms, battling with the wrong frames and approaches to that problem.

What system of practices is needed for African American children and youth that will enrich learning and development in urban public schools?

That is the question the African-centered pedagogy addresses in this volume. I need to say at the outset that this a difficult undertaking. We are talking here about developing a system of practice that cuts against the grain of contemporary thinking on teaching, learning, schooling, and Black achievement. The history of African Americans and their struggle for history is an important background for this thinking because, in a profound sense, the heritage of African Americans already cuts against this grain of the contemporary educational schooling practices in America that have failed its populations of African American children in urban communities. This is the reason that there has to be the foundation of a successful connected pedagogy for African American children.

A careful read of American history shows how closely tied restricted access to quality education is to the social control of African populations in this hemisphere, particularly African Americans, as we will see in chapter 2. The idea of questioning the ontological assumptions of our institutions of education ought to be a foundational given as we examine how tasks associated with Black achievement get framed in the public and educational discourse. Although there are a number of social, political, cultural, and historical factors to Black achievement, the nexus of all these factors is located in the professional practices of a teacher, which is where we will focus our attention.

A SYSTEM OF SCHOOLS IN CRISIS

Currently, urban public school systems are still failing African American children in epidemic proportions. Nationwide, African American students are disproportionately expelled, suspended, and referred to special education programs in urban public schools. African American students lag behind Euro-American students in high school completion and employment. The statistics belie the fact that huge numbers of African American students are not even in this test-taking picture. Significant numbers of African American students, and other students of color, drop out of school—as much as one-half to two-thirds in some city districts. Fewer than ten percent of African American men go to college, yet they constitute 76 percent of the nation's prison population. More African American young people drop out of high school than graduate. This number will only increase with recent passing of a federal education bill that calls for the use of standardized tests for determining whether students can complete school.

The current national response to this state of affairs is an agenda to close what is called the “achievement gap.” Generally speaking, this refers to the persistent and predictable difference in the aggregated average test score

performance of African Americans as compared to European Americans on standardized measure of achievement. African Americans and Hispanics make up a disproportionately large percentage of lowest-performing students and a disproportionately small percentage of those achieving at the highest levels. The gap is most pronounced among test takers of higher socioeconomic status. For example, according to the recently released report of the College Board's National Task Force on Minority Student Achievement, the 1994 NEAP reading test for twelfth graders, African American students whose parents graduated from college had an average score of thirty points below whites with college-educated parents. The gap between whites and blacks with less formal education, by contrast, ranged from sixteen to twenty-five points. As I noted earlier, this gap between "minority" and White achievement starts in the first grade, widens significantly by the third, and remains stubborn throughout college and graduate school. Even those African Americans who get good grades in high school show a drop-off in grade point average once in college.

In my own community of Boston, African American students and Hispanic students fare particularly poorly. One of the primary standardized tests administered by the Boston Public Schools to determine achievement performance is the Stanford 9. Achievement performance is scored on a one to four point scale. A performance level 1 is Below Basic (below grade level) whereas performance level 4 is Advanced Student, or a student that exceeds required standards. Statistics released by the district as of this writing reveal that African American eleventh graders comprise only 2 percent of those who performed *above* the lowest level 1. Results are identical for Hispanics.

Thoughtful urban educators who have been working to improve the quality of education for these children have long argued that the crisis in urban schools requires a more sophisticated response than that of "tooling up teachers" and "raising the bar" for students. It is beyond dispute that the standardized testing industry is part of the mechanism of social inequality. Any system that participates in the sorting and selecting of children and their opportunities based upon some ostensibly "objective measure" of ability is, without question, a system that perpetuates inequality. The reason why these practices of standardized testing persist is because they are integral to the social and political fabric of America, and deeply woven into the same fabric in which the strands of institutional racism and white supremacy are interlaced.

Under conventional practice, it is too often the case that the children who are successful academically are merely the ones who are best equipped to endure the socialization and to suspend their expectations that learning is sensible, meaningful, or purposeful. From a body of ethnographic educational research, we know that children socialized in a culturally mainstream and middle class context are better adapted to this school setting than African

American children. The fact is that too many children adapt to schooling as an experience of routine without meaning, and activity without manifest purpose. The lower the quality of schools, the more prevalent this is (Goodlad, 1984; Oakes, 1985).

Too many children experience schooling as a litany of episodes where they are required to perform a number of tasks that they are led to believe are “good for them.” Under conventional practices, the successful children are those who learn to steel themselves for this existence—to comply with, and perhaps become adept at meeting, the litany of demands, but have given up expecting it all to make sense. (I discover these children in instances where an “accelerated classroom” accelerates further when given the opportunity to engage in purposeful, meaningful, and valuable learning experience which they have a part in constructing, and for which they see the connections to their contemporary experience.)

It is for this reason that the recent innovative models and approaches (e.g., teaching for understanding, teaching for meaning, constructivist teaching, “Total Quality Management,” responsive teaching, etc.) are likely to merely dance around the edges of effective practice with African American children in urban schools. Frameworks such as these do not offer critical perspectives on power and community development, racial, and cultural identity development and meaningful education. In an increasingly racist society, connecting with contemporary problems of violence, drugs, and fear those approaches that do not place the intellectual, social, and political life of the child at the center of pedagogical thinking will be woefully insufficient for quality education for African American children.

FROM PERSONAL NARRATIVE TO CONNECTED PEDAGOGY

The point of sharing this personal history in the context of laying out the problem has to do with the deep structural aims of pedagogy of African-centered pedagogy. The elements of those aims emerged from a reflection on my educational and personal experience. In particular, it was primarily through my association with African American people, not with the public school teachers, that set me on the path of truly powerful pedagogy. It set me on a path that has served me well as a thinker, educator, researcher, and agent of change for social justice.

The African American community teachers in the church afforded me the environment that provided me with the cultural and intellectual tools to learn and achieve in the mainstream, often hostile, schooling contexts of my later experience. Mind you, the church was a setting that was not particularly

intellectual nor was it explicitly cultural in the practices of developing young people. They nonetheless did afford me a figured world of learning, inquiry and achievement—something that the public schools never provided. The critical foundation of the deep structure of African American culture, history, language, and struggle was already a part of the social and cultural fabric of the African American church community. There was already the implicit understanding of the distinction between schooling and education, that education was the broader process of promoting the intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and social development of young people.

These realizations are significant to the project of developing an African-centered pedagogy. Despite having limited access to the community teachers in the African American community, that context influenced my thinking and development in far more profound ways than the public school experience. Moreover, it was the contrast between these two settings (the African American community teachers and the settings of public school) that triggered my development in exactly the sense that W. E. B. DuBois (1903/1989) described as identity formation through a “dual consciousness.” This educational experience helped to inoculate me against that which fractures the development and educational futures of so many African American boys and girls in the public schools. It is this experience, that Paulo Freire (1970) called “conscientization”—the growth to critical consciousness—that I propose we replicate for African American children in public schools as an essential part of their educational experience. However, there are significant theoretical foundations of this project as well that constitute the “right frames” to the problem of Black underachievement. The remainder of this chapter will examine those foundations.

MOVEMENT TO SOLUTION: CULTURAL DEFICITS TO ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the last decade researchers and scholars concerned with the specific needs of urban teaching and achievement of African American children have further delineated teaching expertise for successful work in culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse contexts. A number of scholars (Comer, 1997; Fordham, 1988; Foster, 1989; Kunjufu, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1984) have examined the nature of this growing disparity in the educational outcomes between African American children and their white mainstream counterparts. What these studies have shown is that culturally mainstream White school settings pose social, cultural, political, and developmental challenges for African American children that go unrecognized by school teachers and per-

sonnel, but that nonetheless have significant adverse impacts on students' adjustment to school life.

Let me provide just a brief history as to why this recent turn in educational research is significant. The research literature in the 1960s and 1970s fostered a cultural deprivation model that assumed pathology of family, home, and community as the explanation for achievement of African American children. This model promotes the idea that African American students are culturally and financially deprived, deficient, and deviant in some way (Ladson-Billings, 1994). In the last decade or so there has been some change in thinking regarding the preparation of teachers for successful work with African American learners in urban schools (see Weiner, 1993; 1999). But because research paradigms are embedded in a social and historical context, we can expect this deficit-model thinking to resurface as the political landscape changes around issues of education.

Decades of the deficit model in the 1960s and 1970s were followed by another decade of research focusing on teacher qualities and school effectiveness in the 1980s. The 1990s ushered in a perspective the ecological model, rooted in the work of Urie Brofenbrenner, the work of James Comer and educational anthropological work of John Ogbu. This approach emphasized the importance of a systematic account of social context and the interaction of the human, cultural, and political systems involved in teaching and learning. It is an important idea for examining schooling experience of African American children at a structural or sociological level (e.g., Ogbu, 1986), the role of ethnic and racial identity development in that experience (e.g., Sheets & Hollins, 1999), development of knowledge (e.g., Murrell, 1998), and the preparation of teachers (e.g., Weiner, 1993; Murrell, 2001).

James Comer, developer of the School Development Plan, terms the system of intervention *ecological* because it analyzes the behavior of teachers, students, and parents at both a social-collective (environment) level and an individual-personal level. (My entry point is to account for the interactive dynamic of the individual and social environment in instructional practices. I will, in the next section introduce this idea as the mesolevel of analysis that refers to the organization of social systems within the school context.) Comer's system articulates four environments that are seen as affecting teaching and learning in school: (1) the child's home; (2) the family's social network; (3) school environment; and (4) the larger social world. His system attempts to weave together all of these registers of influence in his explanation for the failure of poor, "minority" children in urban schools.

I provide this detail about Comer's system to suggest to you that we are now in a position to move past deficiency explanations of Black achievement, and ready to develop *systems* (both human and material) and *practices* for successful

academic progress and personal achievement. I should note two other important recommendations for the preparation of teachers for successful work with urban African American learners that come from Comer's work. First, that teacher candidates need to understand academic achievement and in-school learning as a product of overall child development—a requirement that asks teachers to be concerned with the development of the whole child as opposed to only being concerned with his or her scholastic progress.

The second recommendation for teacher preparation is the requirement that teacher candidates develop the collaborative abilities and “know how” to create social climates in their classrooms that promote development and learning. This means that accomplished teachers must be able to work collaboratively with support staff, colleagues, parents and others in ways that create systems of development and achievement for children. Weiner's (1993) distinguishes the “ecological model” from a “service delivery” model in the preparation of urban teachers. The central assumption regarding efforts guided by the ecological model is that efforts to improve practices, policies, and pedagogy of urban schools cannot be divorced from a careful examination of the school climate and sociocultural organization of schools, especially as this examination draws on participation of parents and community. Now let us look briefly at how the ecological model relates to teaching.

SOCIAL CONTEXT, CULTURAL CONGRUITY, AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

One application of the ecological model involves the idea of cultural congruence or compatibility. There has been a growing consensus among educational researchers and practitioners that learning is enhanced when it occurs in contexts that are socioculturally, cognitively, and linguistically meaningful to the learner.

Culturally responsive teaching is viewed in the literature as the leading approach to address questions of “teaching to diversity” and working successfully with African American children. Culturally responsive teaching is also referred to as “culturally relevant” teaching (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1994), “culturally compatible” teaching, “culturally responsive” (Gay, 2000) teaching, and “culturally synchronous” teaching (e.g., Irvine, 1990). Culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach to effective instruction in diverse settings. The essence of this idea that what we think and what we feel is culturally situated and shaped. Moreover, what we think and feel about certain activities and practices is socialized by how significant others feel and think

about those practices and activities. For example, a student directed to write something in a journal may experience an intrinsic reward despite being asked to perform the task, whereas another student may feel none of the intrinsic reward and feel frustrated and burdened. The difference is in how the activity of journal writing is construed in the student's culture and represented to them in the situational context.

There are, however, some troubling limitations to the idea of cultural compatibility or cultural congruity. To begin with, when people talk about the cultural incongruity in reference to the experience of African American children in culturally mainstream American public school, there is little sense of "culture" beyond a static category of membership. It is difficult to avoid thinking in terms of "Black culture" as being incompatible with, or incongruous to, "White mainstream culture." This is not a very useful paradigm, nor is it a notion of culture we want to promote. If we continued on this tack, our task as educators would seem to be to reduce the "incongruity" or "incompatibility"—making the cultural pattern of "the other" (minority students) match the pattern of the American mainstream. This reductionism makes the practices of "incongruity reduction" identical to those of the "reducing cultural deficits" because the burden of change is always placed upon the "minority" group. This direction threatens to return us to the previous era of a deficit model of urban education.

The value of the body of work on cultural incongruity theory (e.g., Ogbu, 1989, 1992) was to force an account of how the differences in achievement between African American learners and their Euro-American counterparts inhered in the social and cultural fabric of their educational experiences. Where Ogbu comes up short is the hypothesis of an oppositional identity as a factor in the underachievement of African American children. The issues of how young Black people experience and adapt to school cannot simply be attributed to an oppositional identity.

The hypothesis that students who are "involuntary minorities" (to use Ogbu's term) bring to schooling an oppositional social identity and oppositional cultural frame of reference in response to racism is too simplistic. We African Americans are complete people, and therefore do not conform our cultural identities in response to the ubiquitous institution of racism to any greater degree than White people conform their cultural identities as *participants* in racism. The fact that racism does play a role underscores the urgency for an African-centered pedagogy. But the reifying "oppositional social identity" and "oppositional cultural frames" is the worst sort of essentializing with regard to culture, reducing African American cultural identity to an oppositional response to racism. How does one respond to an institution? One

doesn't. One responds to specific situations, practices, and events—things that happen and actions people take as expressions of the institution. Understanding this complex mixture is more difficult, but not impossible and quite essential if we are to develop effective pedagogy for African American children.

The contribution of the educational ethnography in regard to the notion of cultural incongruity or cultural incompatibility is that it forced the following recognitions:

1. The differential outcomes for children of color in culturally mainstream school settings are complex, and not simply a matter of improving the “delivery system”;
2. The most powerful factors influencing differential impacts inhere in the social and cultural fabric of their daily experience of the curriculum and the classroom as a community;
3. Professional teachers and caregivers are most successful when they are able to maintain the continuity of experience from children's interactions with their first teachers and caregivers;
4. All children develop social, linguistic, and intellectual tools for learning prior to school, but these cognitive and intellectual tools are frequently misunderstood, unrecognized, and undervalued for African American children.

Ladson-Billings (1994) develops the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy to move beyond difference in language and cultural styles to include this broader array of concerns that go into creating a responsive school context.

Within contemporary educational theory and practice, the body of work on culturally responsive practice, unfortunately, is reinforcing the marginalized status of African American learners in public schools. The focus on the “culture” of underachieving African American learners has created an unfortunate diversion from the larger political and social dynamics that create and fortify differential outcomes for African American children. The presumption of difference in cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1997) offers nothing for improving the schooling experiences of African American children without a systematic examination of the cultural, political and social contexts in which those experiences unfold. The approach of narrowing the incongruence by itself is insufficient as an educational approach because, in the absence of a pedagogical theory, it is simply a program of cultural assimilation.

The problem that cultural congruity as a framework creates for designing effective pedagogy for African American children is that it merely repositions the African American experience as “the other”—something “out of synch”

with the universalized mainstream cultural experience represented by school. It implies a process of closing the gaps and making connections, without interrogating the deep-rooted cultural values that are antithetical to the African American conceptions of education, development, and struggle.

Closing the gaps in the aggregate performance on standardized achievement tests does not constitute a strategy for addressing Black underachievement. Neither is it an approach by which pedagogy for successful work with African American learners can be examined and improved. The cultural incongruity notion presupposes an understanding of both a school culture and collective culture of African American children that does not exist. Neither culture is well enough understood for assimilation to be a viable approach for improving teaching and learning in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Without first providing a means of making “commonly sensible” the important elements of culture with respect to schooling in both locations, there is really no foundation on which to build a pedagogy of culturally relevant teaching and learning.

This book looks at pedagogy holistically as a system of practices. This book develops an African-centered pedagogy as a holistic system of practices building directly on the concept of *culturally relevant pedagogy* as it is articulated by Ladson-Billings (1994, p. 17). She distinguishes the culturally relevant pedagogy in precisely the way we need to think of pedagogy: as incorporating more than language and communicative style, more than interactional competence, to include a critical and reflective regard of the social, historical, and cultural positionings of teachers and students in the conjoint actions that constitute teaching and learning. In this way the concept is important to examining and leveraging the teaching proficiencies required of teachers to provide quality education for African American children.

This book continues the foundational work of Ladson-Billings and others in the task of articulating and developing teacher proficiency with respect to African American children, but with an important difference. The point of departure for this book is in the location and articulation teacher proficiency, not in the characteristics of the individual teacher, but in systems of practice in which the teacher plays the pivotal role. This permits the specification of culturally relevant practice not just in terms of individual teachers’ thoughts, values, and actions, but also in terms of human systems of productive interaction where positive student outcomes are manifest in their performance over time.

My approach triangulates (a) teacher action, both planful and in-the-moment; (b) purposeful learning and development goals for students; and (c) student achievement and development performance (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The unit of analysis in this approach is not the individual teacher, but the

activity setting in which that teacher interacts with students and organizes the milieu of productive interaction and development. In this formulation, there is a triangulating system of these three elements in dynamic tension with one another—teacher action, purposeful goals, and performance outcomes.

I discovered the necessity for developing this system of practice idea when I discovered the disconnect between what teachers valued and what they actually did. Let me tell you about one instance in which the disconnect became abundantly clear. The week before I was to visit my classroom of the supervising K–12 teacher where my student teachers were placed, we had a discussion in a meeting of the school action team in which we worked through the Table 3 found in chapter 3. In that conversation, everyone in the group was convinced, including myself, that the teacher was “culturally relevant” in his practice according to our discussion of those features. All other indications I had—samples of work from students in the classroom, the intern’s journal entries of the classroom, and discussion with both the teacher and the intern individually—suggested that the teacher was an exemplar of culturally relevant teaching. The teacher in question was none other than Mr. R., teaching a lesson on *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the same I described in the earlier example.

So here was my first sense of the disconnect between a teacher exhibiting the qualities of culturally relevant practice on one hand, and what actually happens for African American children on the other hand. Here, for me, was the difference between a culturally relevant pedagogy as the characteristics of a teacher and culturally relevant teaching as a system of practices that actually produces achievement outcomes for African American children.

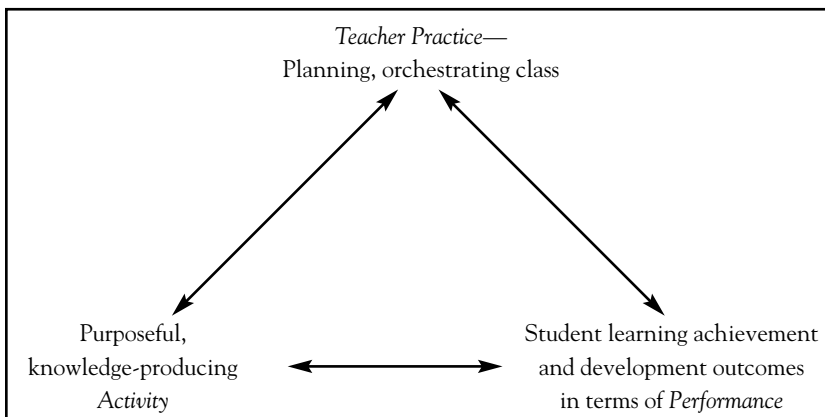


Figure 1. Activity setting—Unit of analysis triangulating teacher practice, learning activity, and student performance.

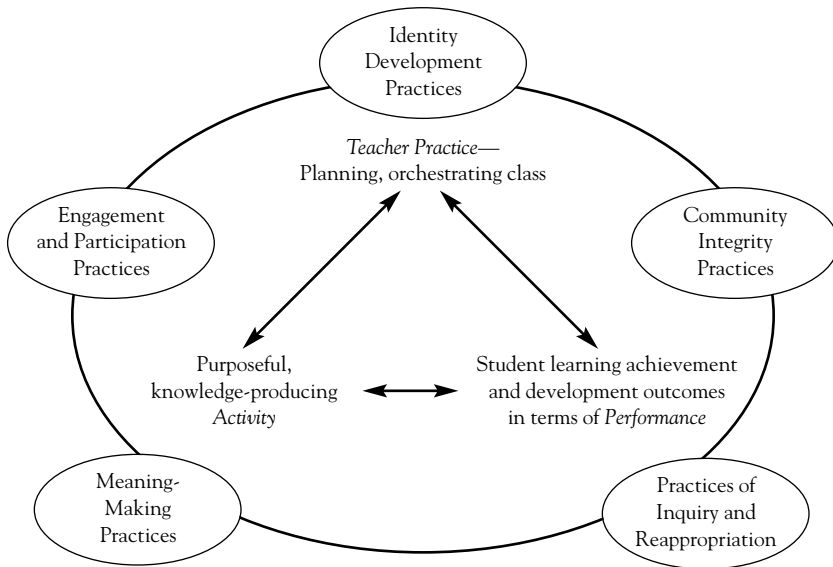


Figure 2. The basic components of the African-centered pedagogy.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Even though the national concern over the “achievement gap” rightly focuses attention on Black achievement (the right problem), it is the wrong response to pursue ways of “closing the gap” as long as achievement principally regarded as aggregate performance on high stakes standardized achievement tests. The real site of the problem is the quality of teaching and learning in real schools and with real learners. There is a cultural integrity to African American educational experience that is missing in contemporary public schooling. So the answer to elevating African American achievement can never simply be a matter of being responsive to *what is*; there must be a critical reconfiguring of *what should be* in the educational experience of African American children. This chapter introduced approaches that appropriately contextualize African American achievement in social, cultural, and historical context—culturally relevant pedagogy and a practice/performance based African-centered pedagogy. Culturally relevant pedagogy is important for the second type of pedagogical depth—being educationally responsive and accountable for *what is*. An African-centered pedagogy address phase one and phase two in depth of pedagogy—constructing African American achievement by drawing on the full cultural and intellectual heritage of African Americans. The entire theoretical framework is depicted in Figure 2.