



This research occurred in two phases. First, I situated the historical, social and political context of Roosevelt City and the emergence of its Black schooling system. This account provided a context for understanding the historical struggle of its Black community to access knowledge within a city based on racial domination and subordination. I analyzed archival data, newspapers and articles, to capture the historical and current atmosphere of Roosevelt City Public Schools. During the second phase, I chose four “transformative” Black teachers to participate in 1) a formal interview about their life story and their teaching philosophies using computer technology; 2) a series of on-going classroom observations in which I examined the classroom dynamics, discourse patterns, activities and the physical setting; and, 3) a series of informal interviews about specific interactions in the classroom. Through the use of ngona, counter-storying, I documented their teaching practice over the course of one thematic unit. Overall, the findings suggest that computers and related technologies 1) assisted teachers in engaging in meaningful instruction about the Black experience, 2) served as an intellectual partner where Black students constructed knowledge; and, 3) became a medium for legitimizing Black student’ real life experiences in the “official curriculum.”

TRANSFORMATIVE BLACK TEACHERS AND THEIR USE OF COMPUTER  
RELATED TECHNOLOGIES IN URBAN SCHOOLS

By

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DEDICATION

*For my cousin, Dr. Leon Holsey*

*For my grandmother, Sallie Franklin and,*

*For the grass that gets trampled while the elephants fight.*

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## **Chapter 1:**

### **Introduction**

The rise and use of technology in 21<sup>st</sup> Century United States has become one of the most dominant issues and challenges facing diverse communities, business worlds, educational arenas and larger U.S. society. Amidst the euphoria about the power and potential of computer technology to transform the ways we learn, the ways we communicate, and the ways society functions, there is increasing debate about who has access to technology, and the consequence of access to full participation in U.S. society. This debate has particular implications for U.S. public schools.

Over the past decade, the Internet and other computer-related technologies have become ubiquitous in many U.S. schools (Technology Counts Report, 2002; Technology in Education Report, 2004). This was largely due to the emergence of community, business, research and policy initiatives that have highlighted the vast number of schools that lacked access to computer technologies. For example, studies revealed that schools comprised of predominately Black<sup>1</sup> and Latino populations were less likely to have multiple computers or Internet access in their classrooms as compared with schools with predominately White enrollment (Gorski & Clark, 2001; Jerold & Orlofski, 1999). This lack of access to computer technology is symbolic of the vast inequalities that exist across race and class in urban schools more generally. This technological crisis is particularly applicable to inner-urban environments where computer technology remains sub-standard or absent from the schooling environment.

### *Purpose of the Study*

Access to the Internet and computer-related technologies continues to present many challenges for poorer inner-urban public schools that serve predominately children of color. Notwithstanding, the growing presence of computer technology in U.S. schools demands that researchers and educators turn their attention to how the Internet and computer-related technologies are used to inform teaching and learning. Such computer-related technologies include digital cameras, educational software, word processing, web authoring and presentation software, and spreadsheets, to name a few. Empirical studies demonstrate that teachers in schools with majority White enrollment are more likely than teachers in urban school settings to use the Internet or instructional computers for gathering information, creating instructional material and teaching students (Smerdon, 2000). At the same time, literature suggests that in urban schools, computer technology is used mostly for skill and drill purposes (NCES, 2000). Thus, access to and meaningful uses of computer technology further privileges those students attending schools that are predominately White while further marginalizing poorer students of color attending schools in urban settings.

Despite the increasing attention by researchers to address issues of access to computer technology in urban schools, little is known about educators working in low-resourced urban schools integration of computer technology into their classroom practice. This paucity is heightened because few studies inquire into the experiences and lives of Black teachers who utilize computer technology as a transformative tool. Although studies have been conducted on successful urban schoolteachers and their pedagogical philosophies (Irvine, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995), few explore how

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<sup>1</sup> I use the terms African American and Black interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

excellent Black teachers use computers “successfully” to enhance teaching practice in urban classrooms for Black students. Furthermore, rarely do reports seek to highlight the stories of urban school teachers, and especially Black teachers, who are educating their students for success in spite of sub-standard resources and compensation.

In order to respond to the absence of Black teachers’ ‘voice’ and their use of technology in educational research and literature, I examined the teaching practices of four transformative Black teachers who worked in the inner urban sector of Roosevelt City: Kathy Jones, Kofi Jefferson, Christina Cooper and Michael St. John. This research, using case study methodology, was guided by the following question: How do transformative Black teachers in urban schools educate their students by using computer technology in their teaching practice? More specifically, I examined teacher perspectives, relationships among students, teacher and technology, curriculum construction, dispositions of teachers as well as the production of knowledge.

#### *Description of the Study*

I utilized an interpretive case study method framed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) to examine the teaching practices of four transformative Black educators. CRT gives central attention to race and racism as a way of understanding the experiences of marginalized communities. Specifically, I focused on how transformative Black teachers developed emancipatory practices that embrace and enhance the experiences of their students. I call these “transformative” Black teachers ‘conductors of the digitized underground railroad’ because they demonstrated a relentless commitment to their Black students. These four Black teachers drew connections between instruction and their students’ racialized

experiences and lives. Since these teachers work largely with Black students, they challenged inequitable schooling conditions by countering barriers to accessing knowledge, a historical issue in the Black community. I found that these transformative Black educators thought about computer technology as a liberating tool. They used the Internet and computer-related technologies to both access and present liberating stories about Black community. In a sense, these Black teachers attempted to develop in their students a sense of 'critical computer literacy.' They wanted their students to use the Internet and computer-related technologies to not only question larger social issues and ideas, but to actively make change for their Black communities. Finally, I came to understand that their use of computer technology was deeply embedded in their teaching practice through the use of storytelling and individualized instruction.

#### Black teachers in Urban Schools:

The four transformative Black teachers in this study are not uncommon. Many Black teachers dedicate their lives to educating Black children in transformative ways. During my own experiences as a middle schoolteacher working in the inner-urban segment of Roosevelt City, my colleagues and I attempted to create environments where our students would be critical thinkers, knowledgeable of their culture as well as aware of the numerous possibilities that existed for them. Teaching in an under-resourced school was, at times, challenging because I rarely used a textbook, since, sadly enough, there were few available. As a result of the lack of easily accessible resources, my teaching became quite exploratory as I would often take my students out of the classroom to walk around their community to teach them about historical issues, contemporary issues, environmental justice, etc. I brought in

guest speakers who would introduce my students to a variety of life experiences and career paths. My students and I would engage in critical dialogue about conscious raising historical events like the Holocaust of Enslavement and the Jewish Holocaust, utilizing artifacts from museums, narrative text and video as reinforcement. I, along with other teachers, would attempt to foster environments in which our students would “read the text” of their world while simultaneously understanding that they could, in turn, create possibilities for themselves.

In the mid-90’s, with the advent of the Internet, computer technology became an educational tool to further enhance my classroom practice. In my mind, computers could open up a new world for my students. We could virtually tour museums, other countries or outer space without leaving our classroom. We could conduct research, without being hampered by the limited book supply in the school and community libraries. We could publish our work, design magazines, books and newsletters while simultaneously enhancing our vocabulary by using the computer’s spell check and thesaurus features. The possibilities, brought about by technology, seemed endless.

Unfortunately, my visions for a “wired” classroom collided with the reality of my work environment, which did not have Internet connectivity although suburban schools across the district line did. In this case, because of their location in a less affluent context, my Black students lacked access to computer technology which, in turn, translated into lack of access to knowledge. Despite these systemic challenges, I still believed that exposure to computer-related technology was critical to my students’ educational experience and to their livelihood. I began writing letters to local businesses asking them to donate computers to my classroom. In addition, I

would drag my personal desktop computer to school daily so that my students would have some exposure word processing and data base programs like Microsoft Word and Excel. These efforts to give my Black students exposure to resources such as computer technology were taken in order to supplement a schooling process in which access to resources represented a historical, persistent and ongoing problem. It is important to note that my experience presenting opportunities that would offer choices to my students attending urban schools was not an anomaly. Many teacher-colleagues also went above and beyond overcoming the challenges of inner-urban schools to provide a safe, nurturing, productive and equitable atmosphere for their Black students.

In general, racially differentiated schooling for students matriculating through U.S. public schools is not a new phenomenon. Since the inception of schooling in America “there have been essential relationships between popular education and the politics of oppression. Both schooling for democratic citizenship and schooling for second-class citizenship have been basic traditions in American education” (Anderson, 1988, p. 1). Today, the distinctly racialized and classed U.S. schooling processes are best evidenced by examining the schooling experiences of those working in and attending urban schools.

Urban schools, as defined by the Department of Education, are schools located in the central city of a metropolitan area and/or serving children who are “socially and academically” at risk.<sup>2</sup> There are 575 such urban districts in the U.S. (ACSI, 2002). However, the term “urban schools” for many denotes more than just

schools located in central cities; in many cases, urban schools signify racial, ethnic, socio-economic and social demographics. In those urban schools that support students of color and poor students, marginalization is most heightened (1995). Darling-Hammond argues, “these schools tend to be funded at levels substantially below those in neighboring districts...[creating] substantial differences in educational resources made available in different communities” (Darling-Hammond, 1995, 466).

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**Table 1.1: Geographic location of Black students attending U.S. schools**

Percent of Black Students	Geographic Location
53.3%	Central cities
33.9%	Metropolitan cities
12.9%	Non-metropolitan cities

U.S Census School Enrollment social and economic characteristics of students: Oct 2000. PP1-148.

Currently, 53.3% of all African-American students attend urban public schools (See Table 1). Thus, Black students who are concentrated in urban schools are most affected by social processes that perpetuate and maintain existing inequitable schooling experiences (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Wilson, 1996).

However, within many U.S. urban schools, progressive Black teachers use creative means to access knowledge. These teachers’ attempt to inculcate Black students with their values and norms by “educating” their students using culturally responsive practices. Such practices focus on “transmitting from one generation to the next knowledge, values, aesthetics, spiritual beliefs and all things that give a

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<sup>2</sup> By socially at risk, the government is referring to 1) child not living with two parents or any parents, 2) the household head is a high school dropout, 3) family income is below the poverty line, 4) child is

particular cultural orientation its uniqueness” (Shujaa, 1995, p. 15). In this sense, many Black teachers, in contrast to thinking of “Blackness” as a deficit needing to be fixed, foster environments within their classrooms that lead to personal and cultural empowerment (Foster, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Lynn, 2000).

### Why transformative Black teachers and computer technology?

Many people believe that the Internet and computer-related technologies are making their mark in the classroom and around the world (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). As CEO Forum, Technology and Readiness Report reads,

To thrive in today’s world and tomorrow’s workplace, American students must have a solid understanding of how technology works and what it can do. (CEO Forum, School Technology and Readiness Report, 1997).

Given the pressure of having to prepare Black students for the ‘digital age,’ the new challenge for schools and for teachers is to foster an environment where students develop necessary technological skills. Additionally, teachers must begin to use the Internet and computer-related technologies in ways that not only raise the level of consciousness in their students, but also in ways that lead to liberation and personal empowerment.

There exists, however, a gap in the literature that gives prominence to how transformative teaching practice using technology in urban schools is manifested for students of African-descent. In general, the research speaks to systemic issues related to teaching and learning and computer technology or the ‘digital divide.’ More specifically, educational researchers examine issues of access to the Internet and

computer-related technologies (Becker & Ravitz, 1998; ; Hess & Leal, 1999; Hess & Leal, 2001). Others explore issues related to systemic reform models, teacher beliefs and student learning (Blumenfield, Fishman & Marx, 2000; Fulton, 1999). Yet other cultural researchers theorize about ideologies that inform the use of computer technology (Mufelletto, 2001; Walton, 1999). Then, there are those researchers who speak to ways to transform teacher-directed practice using Palm Pilots and other technologies (Johnson & Schabb, 1999 ). However, with the exception of a few scholars (e.g., Duran, 1999; Pinkard, 1999) much of the research on urban schools, teaching and technology reveals that the majority of teachers who utilize computers in their classroom practice use computer-based drill and practice programs reminiscent of transmission forms of teaching (Smerdon, 2000;Wenglinski, 1998).

My study emerges from both a need in the Black community to understand how computer technology can be used in culturally empowering ways and a personal desire to understand and hear the voices and the pedagogical practices of transformative Black teachers who use the Internet and computer-related technology in their teaching practice in liberating ways. This dialogue, which typically centers on access to “actual” computers and the Internet, has now expanded to include questions about what it means to educate Black children using technology in the digital age.

Sharing the stories of transformative Black teachers in urban schools could provide insights into exemplary “wisdom of practice.” So often, the literature on “good teaching” ignores the contributions and/or insights of Black educators teaching

Black students. These teachers could offer insights and strategies about successful teaching practices for Black students who are in the current school system.

As it stands, Black children do not fare well in U.S. schools. Research indicates that Black children are placed in special education classes at higher rates than their White counterparts. In U.S schools, 41% of Black students are located in special education classes and comprise 35% of those students labeled mentally retarded (Shockley, 2002). Furthermore, many Black students score below basic levels on achievement in reading and math standardized assessments (NCES, 1999).

I contend that social and cultural congruency between teachers who are members of the Black community and their students is important in teaching for liberation in urban schools (Haberman, 1995; Irvine, 2000). Currently, the teaching force is comprised of 91% White teachers, 8% Black teachers and 1% Native American and Pacific Islander teachers. At the same time, Black students comprise 17% of the U.S. school population (Shockley, 2002). Meanwhile, the general student population is undergoing dramatic shifts in demographics. By 2026, Latino and non-white students will make-up 70 percent of those attending U.S. public schools (Garcia, 1995). The new demographics demand that teacher education programs foster environments where teachers understand the diverse cultural needs of all students across race, class and other forms of difference (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Therefore, I believe that much can be learned by studying the life experiences, teaching philosophy and practices of transformative Black teachers who foster spaces where their Black students are educated in urban schools.

*Research Methodology: Studying the lives and experiences of Black teachers*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) as articulated by Bell (1992), Delgado (1995), Ladson-Billings (1998), Tate (1997) and others frame this interpretive case study methodology that examines how transformative Black teachers in urban schools educate their students through technology. CRT, born out of legal studies, draws on the experiences of people of color to call community members to action against racism in law and in society. More specifically, CRT attempts to 1) theorize about race while also addressing the intersections of race, class, gender and other forms of oppression; 2) challenge Eurocentric epistemologies and dominant ideologies like meritocracy, objectivity and neutrality; and, 3) utilize counter-storytelling as both a methodology and a pedagogical tool (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano, 2000; Tate, 1997).

Using CRT as an analytical frame, I employ counter-storytelling, referred to as *ngona*, to share the stories of how four transformative Black urban school teachers integrate computer technology into their teaching practice. Counter-storytelling is a method of unveiling the experiences of marginalized people that are often muted (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002). More specifically, I share how life experiences with race and racism influenced not only their reasons for teaching, but also their teaching practice. Furthermore, I demonstrate how they utilized the Internet and computer related technology as a liberating tool to meet the personal and cultural needs of their Black students.

The following research question guided this study: How do transformative Black teachers in urban schools educate their students by using computer technology in their teaching practice? The research question stems from assumptions that stories

of people of color have been historically marginalized in research, especially in the field of education; that research is based on moral and political valuations; and, that the intersection of race and class, as well as the historical and current context, is critical to understanding the experiences of these transformative teachers.

I studied the teaching practices of Jones, Kofi, Cooper and St. John over the course of one academic year. I observed teaching practice, conducted interviews and collected classroom artifacts such as student work, course curriculum and class handouts in order to develop a rich understanding of their classroom practice. Table 2 profiles the four transformative teachers, years of teaching, school demographics and computer technology resources.

**Table 1.2: Profile of the four transformative Black teachers**

Teacher	Years of Teaching	School Demographics	Subject Area & Student Population	Computer Technology Resources
Kathy Jones	32 years	High School; 99.5% African American; 77% of students eligible for free and reduced lunch	Graphic Arts 9 <sup>th</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> graders;	Three computers/Internet access on two computers; digital camera; scanner
Kofi Jefferson	21 years	Independent, African-centered school; 100% African American	All subject areas; principal and teacher 5 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Six Dell Desktop computers/Internet access
Cristina Cooper	32 years	100 % African American	Drafting; 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Computer laboratory consists of 25 computers
Michael St. John	20 years	100% African American	Self contained class; 11 year old "emotionally disturbed" Black males	6 rebuilt computers/Internet accessible 3 Apple computers; 1 digital camera; 1 video camera

*Significance of the Study*

This study is important because it examines and draws attention to the classroom workings and interactions of transformative Black teachers located in urban schools. I focus on those teachers who use computer technology to transform the lives of their Black students. Many Black students are located in inner-urban environments where access to computer technology is limited, inferior or completely absent from their schooling experience. Research suggests that when computer technology is present in urban schools, many teachers utilize the technology for drill and skill practice. The question becomes how are transformative Black teachers using computer technology in ways that not only meet their Black students' academic needs. Furthermore, how are these teachers employing the Internet and other computer-related technologies as a liberating tool to meet both the personal and cultural needs of their Black students. Observing the teaching practices of transformative Black teachers who use culturally-responsive practices could provide necessary insights for teachers who are non-Black, but working with multi-cultural populations. Finally, by exploring these teachers' experiences within the complicated and multifaceted context of diverse urban schools, I demonstrate ways in which these teachers are constrained by institutionalized racist and classed structures, as well as how these teachers manage, negotiate and resist these constraints.

As preface to the following chapters, there are a few points that I would like to raise. First, these stories are a reflection of what my participants shared with me, given my questions and my observations at a specific point in time. Second, each story reflects the personality of the participant telling the story. Therefore, each telling is distinct. For example, in the *ngona*, counter-story, of Kofi, I choose to call

him by his first name because that is how I referred to him throughout data collection. Finally, recognizing that these representations are situated in a particular time, place and historical context, I choose to tell these stories in past tense. These teachers' views, perspectives and teaching practices may be different today.

In the following chapter, I will review the relevant literature on Black teachers, uses of computer technology and urban schooling. I begin with an examination of urban schools and theories of institutionalized racism. I then turn my attention to the limited representations of Black teachers in the educational literature. I maintain, throughout this discussion, that many Black teachers have always created spaces to educate their Black children despite structural and social inequalities. Next, I highlight the limited literature on issues of access and uses of the computer technology in urban school contending that there is a need to further understand the lives and experiences of Black teachers who utilize computer technology in transformative ways in urban schools.

Chapter 3 focuses on my own epistemological journey as a Black researcher. In addition, I lay out the research design as a way of presenting how I re-present the lives, philosophies and teaching practices of the transformative teachers in this study. Chapter 4 situates the historical, social and political context of the research context, Roosevelt City, and the emergence of its public school system. By exploring its historically segregated nature, I provide a lens for understanding the current challenges, hopes, desires, frustrations and perseverance of the four transformative Black teachers participating in this study as they battle the ongoing challenge of accessing resources and knowledge in inner-urban schools. In the tradition of their

Black ancestors, I highlight how these Black teachers participating in this study counter resource constraints to educate their students utilizing computer technology for personal and cultural liberation.

In chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, I explore the life experiences, teaching philosophies and teaching practices of the four transformative Black teachers. More specifically, I present how these teachers transformed their practice and fostered an environment where their students' thinking was changed through the use of the Internet, computer-related technologies and other educational tools. In the final chapter, I cull the data collected on the transformative Black teachers in this study to capture culturally responsive uses of computer technology in teaching practices. I offer implications for teachers, teacher educators and the larger community.

## Chapter 2

### **Black Teachers, Pedagogy and Computer Technology in Urban Schools A Review of the Literature**

#### *Laying the foundation*

Despite historic and persistent structural inequalities that challenge their education and access to knowledge, African Americans have continued to place high value on their children's education. Dating back to the Holocaust of Enslavement, members of the African community were severely punished and, on occasion, killed for learning to read and write (Anderson, 1988). In spite of this reality, many enslaved Africans viewed education as a form of liberation. For instance, Booker T. Washington wrote in his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*,

I had no schooling whatever while I was a slave, though I remember on several occasions I went as far as the schoolhouse door with one of my young mistresses to carry her books. The picture of several dozen boys and girls in a schoolroom engaged in study made a deep impression upon me, and I had the feeling that to get into a schoolhouse and study in this way would be the same as getting into paradise (Excerpt taken from David, 1968, p. 97).

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when many members of the Black community built their own educational institutions, some White Americans continued to undermine their efforts toward educational freedom, going to great lengths to delay or deny the use of promised monetary funds (Anderson, 1988; Littlefield, 1994; Siddle-Walker, 1993). Despite these adversities, African Americans continued to resist and reject these practices bravely striving to “self educate” through the initiation of their own schools<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Siddle Walker (1993) recounts the emergence of Caswell Training School as a concrete example of an all Black community-based school that opened in 1906. This school began as a two story house and evolved into a Rosenwald structure in 1924. Teachers and community patrons contributed \$800.00 to complete the project. By 1938, the school housed six hundred children in less than ten rooms.

In the 1950's, African-Americans persistently and proactively worked to confront inadequacies in the American educational process of their children by challenging the legitimacy of under-resourced and segregated schools that were sustained through racist policies that privileged White children. Although revisionist historians recognize that within these segregated schooling sites commitments to self-reliance, sacrifice, community responsibility and racial uplift were evidenced, many African-Americans believed that the racially-differentiated funding allocation to segregated schools adversely affected Black children's schooling process (Siddle-Walker, 1983). However, attempts throughout the 50's, 60's and 70's to dismantle schools serving African-Americans that were "separate and unequal" were met with a bittersweet victory. In many ways, the school desegregation policies negatively affected many members of the Black community (Irvine & Irvine, 1983). For example, a significant number of Black teachers and administrators lost their jobs (Foster, 1993). Today, the majority of Black teachers and students continue to be challenged by de facto exclusion from public schools. Many of these Black students are located in urban schools that continue to receive unequal funding, provide fewer and inferior resources and offer less opportunities (Darling-Hammond, 1995). In these schooling institutions "separate but unequal" conditions still persist in American society (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Technology Counts, 2002).

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Although the parents and teachers wanted to expand the school and a Black patron offered to donate land, past minutes reveal that the "county" was unwilling to use local resources to do this. However, the school persevered and in 1948, boasted better equipment. African American community members pooled resources to hire twenty-two teachers who taught 735 students.

This sustained legacy of limited access to knowledge, in conjunction with institutionalized racism<sup>4</sup>, directly impacts the kind of schooling experiences Black children receive. As Darling-Hammond (1995) contends:

As a consequence of structural inequalities in access to knowledge and resources, students from racial and ethnic “minority” groups in the United States face persistent and profound barriers to educational opportunities. (p. 465).

In 2004, however, the inequalities referred to by Darling-Hammond, woven into the fabric of American society, remain largely unchanged and are further complicated by a new manifestation-- the Internet and computer-related technologies. Now, access to knowledge has been “upgraded” to a digital mode and includes conversations about the Internet and other computer-related technologies. These educational technologies, ubiquitous in some educational institutions, are non-existent, non-functional, or sub-standard in many of the urban schools that serve students of color, and particularly Black students. Despite these adversities, many transformative Black teachers continue to both reject and resist these discriminatory practices of the dominant culture by striving to create spaces to educate their students. Moreover, some of these progressive Black teachers use the Internet and computer-related technologies not merely for the purposes of skills acquisition but also to transform their Black students’ lives.

A paucity of research exists about Black teachers’ use of computer technology in classroom practice in transformative ways. Therefore, this literature review explores two seemingly disjointed strands; first, how progressive Black teachers educate their students and; second, ways that the Internet and computer-related

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<sup>4</sup> Racism is defined as a fundamental characteristic of social projects which create or reproduce

technologies are currently used in urban schools. Within this discussion, I will attempt to unravel the complex raced and classed nature of schooling and the ways that Black teachers, historically and currently, resist dominant ideology through their teaching practice. I begin by providing a context for understanding the “digital divide” as it relates to the African-American community and urban schooling. I then examine representations of Black teachers in educational literature and explore liberatory practices of Black teachers. I close with a discussion of the literature on technology and urban schools.

### Technology and Schooling in the Urban Context

The Internet and other computer-related technologies are by far the most influential teaching and learning machines to make their way into U.S. schools to date. For example, with well over 2 billion indexable pages, the Internet represents one of the largest reservoirs of information. Unlike other educational technologies that have entered the classrooms, the Internet is a powerful medium that could transform the classroom and the U.S. school. Tyack & Cuban (1995) contend that,

Students and teachers can interact with computers in ways impossible with film, radio and television. Depending on the software, preschoolers through graduate students can write and edit, learn languages, have a machine tutor in algebra, retrieve a great variety of email from students a continent away, prepare multimedia reports, use state of the art technology for drafting, auto mechanics or office work. (p. 126)

Thus, when computer technology is integrated into the school setting, the teaching and learning possibilities are endless. Many schools are embracing computer technology. This growth in the presence of technology can be seen by the increase in funding earmarked for computers in instructional purposes which grew from 18

percent to 96 percent between 1981 and 1997 (Newby, Stephich, Lehman & Russell, 1996). Some current reports reveal that as of 2003, 98 % of schools had access to the Internet and 74% of all teachers use the Internet for instruction purposes (Technology in Education, 2004).

Despite the unparalleled growth and the abundance of teaching and learning possibilities that the Internet and other computer-related technologies make available to teachers, many researchers remain mindful that access to computer technology in U.S. schools may not result in more meaningful educational experiences. For instance, some scholars (Cuban, Kirkpatrick & Peck, 2001; Tyack & Cuban, 1994) argue that teachers must embrace computer technology. Others (Becker & Ravitz, 1998; Clark & Gorski, 2001; Hess & Leal, 2001; Hess & Leal, 1999; Wenglinski, 1998) believe that many Americans, specifically poor people and people of color, are not afforded opportunities to access computer technologies presenting yet another challenge in the battle for equality. Yet others (Clark & Gorski, 2001; Gorski, 2001; Light, 2002), contend that computers, in and of themselves, will not change the overall racialized, classed and gendered nature of society.

Significantly, there are cultural theorists of computer technology that contend that computers and its discourse are firmly rooted within a Westernized discourse, which does not allow for the voices of 'others' (Donner, 2003; Bowers, 2000; Bigum, 1998; Hank Bromley 1998). Bromley (1998) believes that "far being neutral instruments, computers, like other technologies, are involved in many ways in the construction and use of power: in the way they are designed and built, in how they are sold and to whom, and in how they are used....They partake in an epistemology that promotes certain visions of knowledge and notions of who counts as a knowing subject" (p.2). Thus,

technology viewed in a racialized, classed and gendered light, must be questioned; whose cultural symbols are being reproduced, disseminated and consumed and what effect does that have on the lives of students who experience this? What is the power relationship? And, what do computers as symbols mean? To be sure, the computer and related technologies, as an educational tool, serves as an extension of its user. As a teaching machine, however, it could serve the interest and values of the designer and/or the dominant group (Mufelleto, 2001).

Finally, Donnor, (2003) argues that much of the analysis about computer technology tends to neglect the life-histories of racially marginalized groups in which there exists a legacy of being adversely affected by technology's introduction, as well as their own introduction to Western societies. As a way of bringing this story of technologies and the African experience to the fore, I will demonstrate how the use of technology is embedded in the historical experience of people of African descent. Additionally, I will highlight some of the ways technologies has impacted people of African descent. This telling is important because it may shed light on people of African descents' perspectives of the Internet and other computer-related technologies as well as on the construct of the "digital divide" as socially constructed through experience.

### Perspectives of Technologies and the African Experience

Cultural theorists of computer technology note that technologies, in general, have been used to the detriment of communities of African descent (i.e., guns used for enslavement, cotton gin). Consequently, an element of distrust may exist among some African Americans in relation to the use of computer technology and technologies in general (Mack, 2001; Walton, 1999). The distrust does not rest in the technology as a set of devices, rather the distrust is directed toward the ways in which technology has been used by Europeans to enslave and disenfranchise Africans over the last 400 years. Here it is not my intention to generalize nor is it my intention to perpetuate narratives of victimization as evidenced so frequently in literature about African Americans and technology (Nelson, Tu, Hines, 2001). There is an abundance of evidence that demonstrates that African Americans have a rich history of innovating new technologies (e.g. Garret Morgan, George Washington Carver, Madame C.J. Walker) and using technologies in empowering ways (Greaves, 2001; Coleman, 2001). However, African American perspectives of technology are uniquely informed and contextualized within a history of technologically enabled systems of oppression.

By presenting the way in which technology has been historically viewed for many African Americans, I am not suggesting that this perspective is monolithic, because individuals and cultures are complex. Rather, it is my desire to present some general themes as it relates to African Americans' historical perspectives with technology in Africa and the Diaspora and to demonstrate that technological

advancement for Whites, have not necessarily served in the best interests of communities of African descent.

As Walton (1999) argues, “the history of African Americans since the discovery of the New World is the story of their encounter with technology, an encounter that has proved irremediably devastating to their hopes, dreams and possibilities” (p. 3). For example, western technology was integral in the enslavement of African people; Europeans used firearms, vastly superior to the African weapons, to capture and enslave members of the African community. These Europeans, in the name of progress, used technological innovation to expand economically and territorially as well as to dominate ideologically. In 1793, when slavery was being called into question on cotton plantations, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin that allowed harvested cotton to be picked clean of seeds. For many European owners of enslaved Africans, the invention of the cotton gin led to further European expansion and strengthened the slave economy. In essence, this invention led to massive domestic slave trade. For thousands of Africans, the invention of the cotton gin resulted in continued enslavement in Mississippi, leading to the loss of freedom, family and culture for many Africans; the number of enslaved Africans, during this time, rose from 498 in 1784 to 194,211 by 1840 (Walton, 1999).

Over the last fifteen years the increase in automation has been credited for the enormous loss of jobs in the service industry. Head (1996) argues that “the main task of the reengineer is to use information technology to streamline the more routine activities of business life...[the reengineering boom came about] when computer software became increasingly able to do the jobs of and often replace, large numbers

of workers in hundreds of companies.” (p 49). Service industries such as insurance, banks, restaurants and hotels all adopted their own forms of reengineering. Many jobs that were historically held by Blacks, became computerized and automated, in the name of technological progress for business owners.

These examples demonstrate a history of “technology” as it relates to the lives and experiences of African Americans provides insight into the intention and uses of technologies in the lives of Black Americans. The way that technology is used is not neutral; in many ways it is about social and institutional relationships that guide and steer the symbols and practices that legitimate and maintain systems of control (Mufelletto, 296).

As we think about computers and other technologies and their application in the educational settings, we must be mindful of how technology is used and how Black people make meaning of its usage in the name of advancement. We must raise questions such as advancement for whom and at what cost? In addition, we must remain cognizant of the values that inform the use of computer technology by situating technology within an historical, cultural, political and social context, in relation to African Americans. Finally, by viewing technology as a cultural artifact, we may be able to better understand the current challenges facing African Americans as it relates to their heightened marginalization and quality of uses of computer technology.

*Black Americans, the Digital Divide and Urban Schools*

Since the explosion of the Internet in the 1990's, a proliferation of popular media, research and policy initiatives emerged to inform the public of the growing gap between the "haves" and the "have nots." These conversations, which focus on access to computer technology are commonly referred to as the "digital divide." However, when examined closely, it can be argued that the "digital divide" speaks to the endemic nature of racism and classism woven into the fabric of American society.

In general, recent empirical studies reveal that African-American and Latino households are less likely to have access to the Internet than White households. Furthermore, Whites, particularly middle-class, are more likely to have Internet access at home than African Americans or Latinos from any location (Hoffman & Novak, 1999; U.S Department, 1999). This lack of access to technology limits members of the Black and Latino communities from not only fully participating in the workforce, but also from participating in society in ways that could lead to community empowerment. Wilson (1999) contends that the computer revolution is the main reason for the demand in technologically skilled workers. He further argues that most inner-city workers "need to have the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, [and] they need to know how to operate a computer as well" (p. 61). Here, Wilson raises an important point. In addition to improving literacy rates and mathematics skills, it is critical for schools and teachers to cultivate environments in which students become literate in computer-related technologies in order to survive in today's workforce. As Wilson points out, it is those poorer members of the African

American and Latino urban communities, who lack computer technology skills, who are either poorly paid or unemployed (Wilson, 1996; Wilson 1999).

Access to computer skills presents a challenge for many members of Black and Latino communities. As a result, urban schools serve as one of the few access points to computer-related technologies for these children in inner urban environments (US Department of Commerce, 1999). This point cannot be overstated. Access to computers in under-resourced schools has enormous implications on the future of those communities and for U.S. society, in general. In many cases, technology in inner urban schools is limited, sub-standard or non-existent.

In many urban schools, reports indicate that students in poorer schools have less access to technology and the Internet than those students living in more affluent areas (Becker & Ravitz, 1998; Hess & Leal, 1999; Hess & Leal, 2001). And, when computers are being utilized in poor, urban schools, much of the practice reflects skill and drill (Becker & Ravitz, 1998; Wenglinski, 1998). Unfortunately, research, both quantitative and qualitative, is limited in the area of the “digital divide” and its application to urban schools. Thus, little is known about how Black teachers create spaces where technology is used in progressive ways.

### Black students, Technology and Urban Schooling

Black educators who teach, using computer technology, in low-resourced urban environments face extreme challenges. In general, literature pertaining to urban education is littered with accounts of tracking (Cooper, Slavin & Madden, 1997; Oakes, 1985); oppressive conditions (Kozol, 1991); tendencies toward over

centralization and over-bureaucratization (Button, 1994), as well as examples of poor teaching (Haberman, 1991). Moreover, these schools suffer from unequal allocation of resources and other institutionalized policies (Darling Hammond, 1995; Fine, 1991; Kozol, 1991) which translates into dilapidated infrastructures, distributions of substandard books (Neuman & Celano, 2001) and limited or inferior access to computer and related technologies. In what follows, I will address the latter issue of unequal distribution of resources in urban contexts, specifically relating to the Internet and computer-related technologies.

To understand the urban context and computer technology, it is important to examine the pervasive inequitable conditions of many urban schools. First, old, dilapidated buildings house students as they matriculate through the public school system. To illustrate, one young, female student attending a public school in Washington, DC described the school in the following quote,

The school is dirty. There isn't any playground. There's a hole in the wall behind the principal's desk. What we need to do first is rebuild the school...buy doors for the toilet stalls in the girl's bathroom. Fix the ceiling in this room; make it a beautiful clean building...[the] way it is, I feel ashamed" (Kozol, 1991, p. 181).

This young girl's assessment of her schooling environment is confirmed in more recent reports that suggest that the structural conditions of urban schools are sorely in need of renovations. For example, 81% of urban schools reported that they needed money for urgent repairs. Moreover, 82% of schools with over 50% minorities reported that they needed renovations and modernization (NCES, 1999). Addressing the physical conditions of urban schools is such a high priority that purchases and expenses for computer technology, for instance, often become a low priority.

Low-technology resources, like books, are inferior or limited in urban schools. A study conducted in Philadelphia sought to examine the literacy resources in low-income neighborhoods and in middle-income neighborhoods in Philadelphia (Neuman & Celano, 2001). They found that urban children, in poorer neighborhoods, would have to “aggressively and persistently” (p. 15) seek out a variety of reading materials because inequalities prevailed in the school libraries—in the lowest income neighborhood the number of books per child was 10.6 as compared to its suburban schools where there were 18.9 books per student. These researchers additionally noted that books found in poorer urban neighborhoods were often in worse conditions.

Similarly, limited or inferior access to high-technology resources such as the Internet and computer-related technologies continues to plague urban schools. Jerold and Orlofski (1999) report that in more affluent schools connectivity rates are higher: students are 17 times more likely to connect to the Internet than those in urban schools. In the same vein, Hess and Leal (2001) examined issues of inter-urban access to computer technology—the racial divide—building on an earlier study conducted in 1999. This study, which was based on data collected in 1995, was conducted, in large part, to determine whether inequities across school districts existed. Data were gathered from 85 school districts. Findings revealed that within urban school districts, there appeared to be racial inequalities in computer provisions. Students in school districts with larger percentages of Black students had less access to computer technology in their classrooms.

### Differences in Pedagogy

In addition to challenges associated with lack of access to the Internet and computer-related technologies, studies indicate that the way teachers utilize technology differs depending on whether they teach in predominately White or 'Brown and Black' schools. Reports find that teachers located in affluent white schools are more likely than teachers in urban schools to use computers and the Internet for a wide range of activities (NCES, 2000). These varied activities include gathering information, creating instructional materials at school, communicating with colleagues and instructing students (NCES, 2000). In urban environments, studies reveal that teachers utilize technology in a "skill and drill" manner. Wenglinisky (1998) contributes to this data by adding that Black students, in particular, are more likely to participate in skill and drill computer activities as opposed to higher order uses of computers.

Academic tracking within urban schools further delimits Black students' access to computer technology. For example, Becker and Ravitz (1998) conducted a study to determine differences in the extent to which the Internet is being utilized between and within diverse schools throughout the country. They surveyed over 300 schools that were part of a larger professional organization for schools that were connected to the Internet. Becker and Ravitz (1998) found that, in general, high ability groups were more likely to have access to the Internet than lower ability groups. Moreover, in more diverse schools, teachers were substantially more likely to use the Internet with their high ability groups. Lastly, they revealed that teachers with the greatest knowledge of and experience with the Internet were more likely to

teach the higher ability groups. All of these factors affect students' access to computer technology. As Oakes (1992) contends,

Race, social class, and track assignments correlate consistently with low-income, non-Asian minorities who are disproportionately enrolled in low-track academic classes and advantaged students and whites more often enrolled in the high track. (p. 13)

Thus, academic tracking, as described by Cooper (1997) and Oakes (1985), is upgraded to a "digitized" mode and is now playing an active role in perpetuating social and economic inequalities. Once again, those Black students who are most in need of access to additional resources via the Internet, are bound to classrooms in which the Internet and computer-related technologies is least likely to be employed or employed in minimalist ways.

*Race Matters: Critical Race Theory, Technology and Urban Schools*

Inequities in the distribution and use of the Internet and computer-related technologies between the affluent and the less affluent students translates into differentiated educational opportunities for students matriculating through the public school system. The question becomes how can this process of differentiated schooling opportunities be explained? One approach has examined the capitalist structure on which the American schools are based. For example, the social reproduction model, rooted in Marxist and neo-Marxist critiques, begins with the assumption that institutional agents such as schools, reproduce, reinforce and legitimize the hierarchy present in the workforce by socializing those matriculating through schools to take and accept their place in the workforce (Solorzano, 1995). In other words, the economic conditions of the society influence the structure of the

educational setting (Anyon, 1983; Bowles & Gintis, 1976, Hacker, 1992). The educational site, then, serves as a structural mechanism for reproducing class inequalities. However, this analysis does not account for student agency (Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1977), teacher agency (Ball, 2000; Henry, 1998) or how participants in the system reproduce the social order (Willis, 1977; Valli, 1986). Additionally, this explanation does not consider the way in which those within the Black community create spaces to empower themselves regardless of the oppressive structures that work to marginalize them (Hill-Collins, 1990). Finally, this theory does not help us understand race and racism, both individual and institutional, as a social construct within the lives and experiences of Black teachers (Ladson Billings & Tate, 1995). Therefore, we must look to other theories to understand the intersections of race, structure and agency.

When I am reminded of the Black communities' enduring struggle against inequality and access to knowledge, an analysis of the intersections of race and class becomes critical to explaining the current crises facing those in urban schools. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a contemporary theoretical framework that challenges the ways in which race and racial power are constructed and represented in American legal culture and in society as a whole. Critical race theory as an "intellectual movement emerged in the mid-1970's from the work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman. In essence, CRT attempts to analyze the social disparities between races, and critiques the dominant white hegemonic discourse and power by centralizing history and context (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). CRT rejects notions of objectivity and neutrality; sees racism as endemic within U.S. society

(Bell, 1995); employs a variety of theoretical traditions including feminism, Marxism, post-structuralism, and critical legal studies in order to provide a more complete analysis of raced people (Tate, 1997); incorporates individual's "experiential knowledge" in order to posit that "reality" is situational and socially constructed (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p.11); and works towards the elimination of racial oppression, with the goal of ending all forms of oppression (Lawrence III, Matsuda, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993).

#### CRT as a theoretical lens for understanding the significance of race and racism

In this study, CRT helps to explain why raced-based policies in the U.S. work to benefit White Americans. Bell (1995) posits the interest-convergence theory which advances that the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will only be accommodated when it converges with the interests of Whites" (p.22). An example of interest-convergence theory would be the creation of well funded magnet schools to lure White students back into urban schools (Morris, 2001).

CRT also provides a way of understanding how "whiteness" has emerged as a form of 'property' in the U.S. According to Harris (1995), a system of property predicated on race emerged as a result of slavery in the U.S. More specifically, Black people were treated as forms of property. As a result, laws based on differential treatment, grew out of the social construction of race during this time: "Blacks were not permitted to travel without permits, to own property, to assemble publicly, or to own weapons—nor were they to be educated" (p. 278). As Harris argues, "whiteness" not only became a shield from slavery but also became a line of

protection from the threat of commodification. In other words, “White identity and whiteness were sources of privilege and protection, their absence meant being the object of property.” (p. 278) Theoretically, laws recognized the expectations of Whites built on systems of privileges produced by white supremacy. The laws also acknowledged and reinforced property interests in whiteness that reproduced Black subordination.

Harris contends that “whiteness” not only meets theoretically descriptions of property but also functional criteria as well. Hence, “Whiteness,” albeit a “bad” form of property, can be thought of as property: Right of disposition; right to use and enjoyment; right to exclude (see article Whiteness in Property). In sum, she believes that Whiteness had value, is valued, and is expected to be valued by the law.

“Whiteness as property” as a micro-theory of critical race theory is helpful in understanding how members of the White race were privileged within the worlds of defacto and de jure segregation in Roosevelt City. Initially, Whites benefited based on the Plessy v. Ferguson Decision. After Brown v. Board, members of the White community came to expect certain privileges in Roosevelt Public Schools.

“Whiteness as property” helps to contextualize policies such as the reasons for the implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education* and its failure to reach its full promise.

Another tenet of CRT is counterstorytelling. Counterstorytelling is a method of telling the stories of marginalized groups that are not often told (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002). Lawrence’s (1995) understanding of the ‘Word’ is significant to my study, methodologically and epistemologically. His construct of the “Word”,

grounded in African storytelling, is used as a way to bring forward the stories of the transformative teachers in this study. The “Word” is a narrative method, in the tradition of resistance, that brings about social change. Counter storytelling, an important component of critical race theory, became not only my way of knowing but also a method for sharing my understandings of transformative Black teachers’ practice in this study. I name my counter stories ngona.

### Critical Race Theory in Education

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) are credited with officially introducing CRT to the field of education with their article, “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education.” Currently, there are several scholars in the field of education who have begun to apply critical race theory (CRT) as a research paradigm for understanding and informing how race, racism, and racial power within education occurs and is structured (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn, 1999; Solorzano & Yasso, 2000; Tate, 1997). According to Parker and Lynn (2002) educational research has traditionally: ignored historically marginalized groups by simply not addressing their concerns, relied heavily on genetic or biological determinist perspectives to explain away complex social educational problems, or epiphenomenized or de-emphasized race by arguing that the problems minority students experience in schools can be understood via class or gender analyses that do not fully take race, culture, language, and immigrant status into account (p. 13).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argue that those living in more affluent neighborhoods have higher tax assessments. Consequently, this translates into higher expenditures per pupil for those living in more affluent areas. Therefore, in U.S.

society, “those with better property are entitled to “better schools” (p. 8) and, in turn, more affluent students in these schools, have more access to resources like the Internet and computer-related technology. Ladson-Billings (1998) further develops this framework and views CRT in education as an approach for understanding how race, racism, and racial power affects: the educational experiences of African American students (i.e. instruction), the educational outcomes of African Americans (i.e. assessment), the allocation of resources (i.e. funding), the content of the official school curriculum and school desegregation (p.18-21).

By critiquing the way in which monies are unequally funneled into schools, critical race theorists challenge American ideals such as objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality and equal opportunity (Solorzano & Yasso, 2000) by highlighting the consequences of America’s racist society and its effect on innocent children attending American schools. Critical race theory provides a lens to view the way computer technology is used in urban school.

In essence CRT helps me to understand and explain the endemic nature of institutionalized racism evident within U.S.’s history and its socializing systems such as the educational setting. For example, Wilson (1996) explains that members of the Black community residing in urban centers, with no formal education beyond a high school diploma, are increasingly becoming displaced from mainstream employment. For Black students in urban schools, lack of access to technology represents a major deterrent to economic security and upward mobility. CRT provides a window to ask what are the educational experiences of Black students from their perspective? How does policy affect these students’ life experiences? What historical context created

inequitable schooling experiences along race and class lines? How is computer technology used in the schooling experiences of these Black youth? What can be learned from members of marginalized groups' stories?

Resistance theory is useful for understanding how Black teachers and students experience and struggle against the current social structure. Resistance theory is also helpful in comprehending the Black community's continuous efforts to self-educate, despite enduring obstacles in that it offers a language of "hope" (Freire, 2001; Giroux, 1987). Although resistance theorists recognize that society is structured in a way that benefits the "oppressor" and disempowers the "oppressed," these theorists contend that transformation can, and does, occur through resistance. Schools, then, serve as "contradictory social sites" (Giroux, 1983. p.155) where teachers and students act as producers rather than transmitters of knowledge. Within this context, teachers and students become social agents of change through the process of "reading their worlds," history and circumstances, in other words, coming to understand their own personal text. Giroux (1987) explains,

... for teachers are not merely dealing with students who have individual interests, they are dealing primarily with individuals whose stories, memories, narratives and readings of the world are inextricably related to wider social and cultural formations and categories (177).

Teaching becomes a political act that encourages dialectical discourse and catapults thinking, between pedagogue and student, to new heights. Knowledge is not a neutral construct, rather it is generated from a dialectical relationship that exists between students, teachers and the curriculum (Freire, 2001). Although this frame contributes to the dialogue for enacting individual and collective agency, especially within urban

schools, this body of literature, like societal determinism, tends to forefront issues of social class, at times, to the marginalization of race and gendered contexts of schooling as it relates to reproduction and resistance (Solorzano, 1995). It is important to keep in mind that resistance can also be contradictory in that it may lead to the reproduction of oppression and inequality (Willis, 1997; Valli, 1986).

Blending these theories, critical race and resistance, helps to elucidate how Black teachers in urban schools overcome issues of lack of access to knowledge, unequal funding and racialized, classed and gendered oppression to find ways to teach using technology in progressive ways.

In this section, I attempted to provide a context for understanding the work conditions of Black teachers in urban schools. I discussed the theoretical groundwork for the my study that examined how progressive Black teachers use technology to enhance their classroom practice. In the next section, I turn my attention to the progressive teaching practices of Black teachers. I begin by speaking to the multiple representations of Black teachers in the literature.

### *Re-presenting Black Teachers*

Foster's (1995) mining of first-person narratives written during the 20<sup>th</sup> century reveals that there are few historical accounts of Black teachers and their practices. When accounts were written, they present a narrow representation of Black teachers and serve to undermine. Oftentimes Black teachers are portrayed as holding low expectations for their Black students (Anyon, 1997; Rist, 1970). These teachers are also viewed as unprepared and uncertified (Carter, 1989; Warren, 1989).

Black teachers are rarely presented in scholarly accounts or in popular culture. Depictions of White teachers “saving” urban or rural youth are more readily seen in movies and books such as *Conrack* (1974), *Dangerous Minds* (1995) and *Music of the Heart* (1999). In general, images of Black teachers committed to the education of Black students are rare. When Black teachers are represented, especially in sociological and anthropological literature, one dimensional stereotypical images dominate, demonstrating the “prototypical” Black woman teacher who neither identifies nor relates well with her students of African American descent (Lynn, 2002; Foster, 1995). Such accounts, in a sense, provide a cursory analysis of Black teachers; however, examining the experiences and practices of Black teachers is complex and necessitates a deeper understanding of the social context and pressures in which these teachers work and live. Unfortunately, the body of literature on Black teachers is sparse; thus, depictions like the aforementioned ones are presented more often than not (Foster, 1995; Foster, 1997).

Countering the many accounts that present Black teachers’ practices as inferior, a small body of literature began to provide multiple representations of Black teachers. With the growth of these studies, produced by historians and some educational researchers, the literature has now come to re-present more promising accounts of Black teachers. For example, Foster (1997), in her quest to render a narrative of the experiences of Black teachers, devoted an entire book to the lives and practices of Black teachers who taught before during and after the Civil Rights Movement. In her text, *Black Teachers on Teaching*, she interviewed twenty Black teachers, whom she refers to as the elders, the veterans and the novices, born between 1905 and 1973.

This book draws from a life history approach to seek understanding as to “how teaching has been experienced and understood by Blacks engaged in the profession” (p. xx).

In this re-presenting, Black teachers became what Fairclough (2001) refers to as “double agents” since they utilize overt and covert forms of resistance for the purposes of serving the Black community and Black children. They also served as political activists and advocates for their Black students. This is best represented in one of Foster’s “she-roes,” Madge Scott, who tells of her experiences in employing active and passive resistance in order to provide her Black students with culturally-relevant teaching. In her vignette, Scott compares her life working in a predominately Black school in Florida with her experiences working in a predominately White school in Connecticut. She remembers that in the Black school, Black teachers “did a lot of things that did not coincide with a mostly white school and were not sanctioned by the board” (p. 38); needless to say, most of these activities were done covertly. They would supplement the standard curriculum with culturally-relevant material—infusing topics on Black history, art and literature. In addition, they would sing *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, the Black National Anthem, before every class and assembly. However, during official observations by a supervisor, the singing and any instruction about Black people would be set aside, and teachers would only teach from the “official curriculum.” In this case, Madge, and other teachers at the school, risked their livelihood to insure that the curriculum they taught connected to the lives of their students.

When Madge Scott relocated to Connecticut from Florida, she immediately noticed that the predominately white Connecticut schools had more resources and a more relaxed atmosphere. While living and working in Connecticut, she continued her commitment to the small number of Black children attending her new school. She also explained that her role in the teacher's association changed. In Florida, Scott was a member of American Teachers Association, an all Black statewide association; however in Connecticut, Scott was part of the constituency of two unions, the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) and the Hartford Federation of Teachers (HFT). She remembered that HFT was not popular among Black Teachers because, "the union would go along with labor strikes and support teachers' interests over those in the Black community" (p. 41). Thus, Scott supported the union as far as salaries were concerned, however, when there was a strike, she would still go to work before the picket line started in the morning and leave after the picket line dispersed. For her, as a Black woman committed to racial uplift—"the school had to stay open. Striking meant that Black children who were desperately in need of schooling were going to be denied the opportunity to learn, so [she] continued to teach" (p. 41).

Madge Scott's advocacy for Black children, her development of and focus on culturally-relevant material and her dedication to her professional responsibilities, in many ways, mirrored the participants in this study. For example, all of the transformative teachers in this study made intuitive choices about what would be taught to their Black students. Although these teachers taught the state-mandated standards, they supplemented the content in ways that reflected the lives, experiences and culture of their students. Rarely did I see the use of textbooks. Instead, in most

cases, teachers used their students' lives as a text from which they built their classroom instruction. Also, all of the teachers in this study were well aware of the way inner urban schools served to perpetuate and reify raced and classed relations in U.S. society. In spite of the political atmosphere, these transformative Black teachers worked within the system to provide spaces for their Black students to be educated.

In particular, Cooper's actions typified the advocacy demonstrated by Madge Scott. Cooper served as union representative in her school for several years. In addition, in the year that I observed her teaching practice, she ran for Roosevelt Public Schools union presidency and appeared at all of the Board of Education meetings advocating for more access to computer technology for her students and for more pay for teachers. Furthermore, she utilized the Roosevelt email system as a way to keep teachers abreast not only of the political climate within Roosevelt public school, but also of the political marches, relevant meetings, and professional development opportunities. In all that she did, she advocated for the rights of Black students.

Revisionist and educational scholars present Scott's stories as well as other stories about transformative Black teachers. By doing this, they capture the spectrum of differences of Black teachers with hopes of countering the one-dimensional image that historically dominated the literature. These stories represent the complex experiences that many Black teachers faced within a raced, gendered, and classed environment (Fairclough, 2001; Fultz, 1995; Foster, 1997; Littlefield, 1994) and are used to demonstrate attributes such as caring and high expectations in the segregated all Black school (Siddle-Walker, 1996; Siddle-Walker, 1993). These stories disclose

the ongoing sacrifices and public and private forms of resistance and struggle Black teachers ensued to demand quality education for Black students (Anderson, 1998; Shujaa, 1994). These stories, tied to larger stories of oppression, resistance and liberation, provide a voice for those historically marginalized in the literature and demonstrate how teachers, like Madge Scott, acted as “double agents” to manipulate the system to empower their Black students. More recently, these representations capture the progressive practices of Black teachers by demonstrating both culturally responsive (Ball, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and emancipatory teaching practices (Ball, 2000; Henry, 1998; Irvine, 2000; Lynn, 1999; Mitchell, 1998). Taken in total, these stories seek to contribute to the growing body of literature that portrays the countless dimensions of Black teachers, their experiences, and their practices. In the next section, I will examine three perspectives for teaching Black students: African-centered pedagogy, culturally-responsive teaching, and critical race pedagogy.

#### *Transformative Black teachers and their teaching practices*

Many African Americans teachers have unshakable faith in the power of an education to liberate. Testament of this faith can be witnessed in the early schools created by and for African Americans. In these instances, teachers and the larger community donated labor, funds and materials to sustain these schools (Anderson, 1985). Historically, this tradition has been evident through the commitments of educators such as Fannie Lou Hammer, WEB Dubois, Anna Julia Cooper, Fanny Jackson Coppin, Mary McLeod Bethune, Carter G. Woodson and others. More recently, the desire and willingness to teach in culturally-relevant ways can be evidenced in the practices of many Black teachers in Black urban classrooms.

This section speaks to the teaching practices of Black educators, who build upon the tradition of their fore parents by aiming to transform the lives of Black students utilizing African-centered, culturally responsive, or critical race pedagogy. This body of literature captures the ways in which culturally responsive Black teachers counter the negative stereotypes that have been forced on the community by dominant cultural ideologies (Weber, 2002) by providing their students with more positive Black images. In addition, many of these Black teachers believe that knowledge and ideas are socially constructed. In other words, they formulate their pedagogy based on the notion that individuals construct their own understandings of the world. Thus, knowledge and understandings are constructed by learners through reflection on their interactions with object and ideas (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). However, these Black teachers utilize notions of race and/or culture as a point of departure for thinking about and developing their teaching practice.

It is important to note that while there is overlap in these varied conceptions of transformative pedagogical styles, there are also distinctions. African-centered pedagogy represents a long legacy by Black Americans to develop a teaching style that provides a strong cultural foundation for children of African descent. This cultural foundation is grounded in the Ngozo Saba principles, a summary of African Ethos. Furthermore, those who authentically utilize African-centered pedagogy, only do so within the context of an African-centered school. Culturally responsive teaching, on the other hand, developed as a response to deficit theories of the 50's, 60's, 70's and 80's, although this form of teaching can be seen throughout the segregated Black institutions prior to the Brown vs. The Board of Education decision.

This teaching is marked by affiliation and kinship and connectedness with the African American community (Foster,1995). In other words, this form of teaching is strongly linked to the lives as well as the community of Black children. Unlike African-centered pedagogy, cultural responsive teaching can be found in all schooling contexts. Finally, critical race pedagogy was born from two theories: critical race theory and critical theory. Fundamental to this form of emancipatory pedagogy is centering the concept of race and racism with the intention of transforming the nature of schooling for Black students. Elements of this form of teaching can be seen in both public and private schooling contexts.

Despite these differences, the political nature of teaching is evident in each of these teaching perspectives and culturally-relevant philosophy is embedded in each. I distinguish each pedagogy to show the various forms of progressive traditions pertaining to educating Black children. In the next section, I will explore each tradition in more depth.

### *African-centered pedagogy*

Perhaps one of the broadest and most extensive responses to the racial and cultural domination faced by African American children in America was the African-centered school movement of the 1960's. These schools which "rest on the legacy of the Black studies movement" (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 1995, p. 356) were spawned by the efforts of politically conscious Black teachers. They were created as an alternative education for African American children in urban settings (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994). As important, these schools, which were founded to insure high educational achievement, underscored the necessity of a strong cultural foundation

for children of African descent. Fundamentally, African-centered educators believe that people of African ancestry had the right and responsibility to “center” themselves in their subjective possibilities and potential, and through the centering process, reproduce and refine the best of themselves (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994). African-centered pedagogy, then, is needed to “produce an education that contributes to achieving pride, equity, power, wealth and cultural continuity for Africans in America and elsewhere” (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 1995, p. 296). However, unlike culturally-relevant teachers, central to the sustenance of these educational sites and its philosophy was institutional autonomy (Kifano, 1996). Autonomy, in this case, represented oppositional stances to dominant ideology and offered people of African descent the ability to create a more suitable value system (Kifano, 1996).

Although African-centered teachers theoretically share much in common with culturally-relevant teachers philosophically and pedagogically, a fundamental difference can be seen in the shaping of subject matter. The Ngozu Saba principles, created by Maulana Karenga in 1966 to “enhance the revolutionary social change for the masses of Black Americans” were and still are the cornerstone for African-centered schools (Love, 2002). The Ngozu Saba principles, which summarize the African ethos, are Unity, Self Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity and Faith. Thus, African-centered teachers that embrace this philosophy believe in creating community-based school programs in which African-ness is explored, reconstructed, perpetuated and transmitted (Akoto, 1992). For example, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) initiated one of the first comprehensive African-centered educational programs for

Black children which they called “freedom schools.” Teachers in these freedom schools transformed their teaching to reflect the cultural values of their students. Carson (1981) remarks, “the freedom school teachers eliminated traditional classroom rules and developed innovative teaching strategies designed to encourage free expression of ideas” (p.119). Instead of critically adopting white cultural values evidenced by the curriculum and pedagogical styles, these teachers desired to preserve their African heritage.

These principles discussed by Carson (1981) are well evidenced at NationHouse Positive Action Center located in Washington, DC. NationHouse reveals how the African-centered philosophy is applied to classroom practice. For example, teachers believe that they are a part of a larger family and impart values that encourage communalism and self-reliance. Second, the curriculum counters negative images of Black children projected in the media and popular culture thereby developing in each student a sense of purpose, direction, self esteem and identity. Courses offered at NationHouse include Political Analysis, Social Issues, Problem Solving, Economic Development and Communications. Finally, teachers at NationHouse see themselves as part of the community—transcending the confines of the school building. The school has evolved to become a community center serving the needs of Black children and parents throughout DC and surrounding areas.

Figure 1 illustrates the perspective of an African-centered approach to teaching Black children. As the Interactive circle shows, learning revolves around the student and is reinforced by the families, teachers and community. The curriculum, inclusive of culture/ideology, spirituality, psycho-affective and socio-political

awareness, serves as a mechanism for nurturing and reinforcing intellectual development as well as the building of community. This model is distinct from other teaching models in that it is informed by ideology grounded in traditional African cultural ways of knowing and being.



**FIGURE 1.**  
**INTERACTIVE CIRCLE**  
**Social Placement of Learning/Teaching Encounter**  
 (taken from Akoto's Nation building)

### *Culturally-responsive teaching*

Culturally-responsive teaching resulted from the outpouring of literature in the 1960's on teaching the "disadvantaged" and the "culturally deprived" which was then followed by the "effective" teaching models in the 1970's and the impact of the Black power and ethnic revitalization movements (Ladson-Billings, 1999). As a response,

African American scholars and others conducted qualitative studies that drew on the “wisdom of practice” of Black educators teaching Black children (Boykin, 1985, Hale-Benson, 1986; Irvine, J., 2001; King, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994). These models, interchangeably termed culturally-relevant, culturally congruent, cultural appropriate, culturally compatible, culturally responsive and multicultural (Irvine, 2001), served to counter the deficit models which purported that Black children were deprived, deficient and in need of intervention programs (Ladson-Billings, 1994). It is Ladson-Billings’ (1994) understanding that part of the reason why virtually no research existed on how to address the educational needs of Black children, resulted from the “stubborn refusal in American education to recognize African American children as a distinct cultural group” (p.9). Thus, Black children, perceived as being exactly like white children, were assumed to be “just in need of a little help” (p. 9).

Using Foster’s study on culturally-relevant teaching as a foundation, I will expand on her themes by exploring more recent literature on culturally-relevant teaching. Foster (1995) systematically combed through all studies that pertained to culturally-relevant teaching from 1960 to 1993. Her study revealed prevalent themes that define culturally-relevant teachers. She found in her exploration of sociological and anthropological literature that culturally-relevant teachers could be characterized by cultural solidarity, affiliation and kinship, and connectedness with the African American community. In other words, these teachers consider themselves part of the community. As a result, they “drew on the community patterns and norms in structuring the classroom, they linked classroom activities to students’ out-of-school experiences and [they] incorporated familiar cultural communicative patterns into

their classroom practices, routines and activities” (p. 578). Moreover, Black teachers saw themselves, their students and the community as part of a larger family who protected and advised each other on how to survive in a racist society. These findings are also supported by more historical research that reveals that caring and high expectations displayed by teachers pervaded Black, segregated schools. In those settings, teachers served as a crucial link between the parents and the school administration (Siddle Walker, 1993a).

More recently, other scholars building on Foster’s themes, have operationalized other cultural responsive practices of Black teachers working in urban settings (Howard, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). They have discussed the debates around Black Ebonics (Perry & Delpit, 1998), and they have observed emancipatory teaching practice, which I will explore in a later section (Ball, 2000; Henry, 1998; Lynn, 1999).

In 1988, Ladson-Billings began what would become a seminal study of a group of eight teachers whom she refers to as the Dreamkeepers, in a small predominately African American, low income school district in Northern California. These teachers, all female, five Black and three White, were identified through a community nomination process where the principals, parents and community members deemed these educators excellent teachers of Black children.

Ladson-Billings (1994) found that the “Dreamkeepers” were well aware of systematic injustices that worked to create low expectations of African American children; thus, these teachers viewed their role as helping their students identify the contradictions and inequities in their local neighborhoods as well as the nation and

the world. In addition, these teachers capitalized on their students' home and community culture. They saw themselves as part of the community—in turn, the classroom context became a site in which students came to be considered as part of an extended family. For example, instead of telling Black children Ebonics is wrong, Dreamkeepers explained its relationship to Standard English. This practice is in concert with Perry and Delpit's (1998) philosophy in which they encourage teachers of Black students to recognize that the linguistic forms that a student brings to school are intimately connected with loved ones, community and personal identity. Explaining the connections, as opposed to debunking this language, fosters an environment in which students who speak in the Black Vernacular feel welcomed and secure. Thus, Dreamkeepers built on the lives and experiences of their Black students by nurturing the cultural capital that children, individually and collectively, bring to the classroom.

In another study, Howard (2001) demonstrates that culturally-relevant teaching can be understood in many different ways, but central to Howard's perspective is teaching respect for authority, educating to the whole child, building connections to the community and cultural congruency in teaching practice between the home and school. Howard utilized grounded theory to study the classroom practice of four "exemplary" Black teachers over the course of four-months. He found that these teachers were concerned with social, emotional and moral growth as well as academic and cognitive achievement. In addition, the teachers worked to develop students who were intellectually capable, socially adaptable and morally sound by using holistic teaching strategies that included community service and

citizenship. These teachers stressed the importance of public behavior and social etiquette. Finally, Howard shared that like the Dreamkeepers, these teachers employ communication competencies consistent with the discourse patterns of their students' home environment.

Howard (2001) differs from most accounts of culturally-relevant teaching in that he highlights the dimension of respecting authority. To illustrate, one teacher comments, "...there's always going to be authority figures and people we must respect, and the sooner we learn to do that, the younger we learn to do it, the better off we will be." She continues, "I may disagree with the school district, but even I have to follow the rules that I dare not break. And that is the way it is..."(p. 188). This respect for authority, as advocated by the teachers, could be interpreted as delimiting these students' abilities to critically examine the nature of power and privilege in American society since respect and "playing by the rules" are given priority. Or, respect for authority could be seen as culturally-relevant lessons about survival as it relates to Black students in larger American society. Since questioning the system and "breaking rules" could limit these students' life chances, these teachers urge their students to "play within the rules" as opposed to against them.

Another theme that Howard found "culturally-relevant" pertained to one teacher's yearning to forefront skill building over other competencies. This teacher asked rhetorically, "What good does it do to teach about Black history and cultural pride if these kids do not know how to read and write" (p. 194). In this case, Howard would argue that culturally-relevant practice does not require that the teacher draw connections to the students' cultural heritage, but rather that these teachers find ways

to connect learning to skills that these students need to develop in order to prosper in society.

### *Critical Race Pedagogy*

Unlike culturally-relevant teaching, critical race pedagogy seeks first and foremost, to evoke the emancipatory nature of teaching, keeping social justice goals central to the education of Black children (Lynn, 1999). As important, this form of teaching underscores the role of race and racism, which can be used as an analytical tool to unveil the race-neutral, color-blind, culture of schooling (i.e. curriculum, classroom practice, as well as a critique on “access” to curriculum; instruction and assessment) (Denzin, 2000; Lynn, 1999; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). In addition, critical race pedagogy encourages students to struggle against all forms of racial, ethnic and gendered oppression (Freire, 2001; Lynn, 1999; Solorzano & Yosso; 2000). And, it builds on the connections between students and their communities. Within this context, teachers and students become social agents of change by undergoing the process of “reading their worlds” in other words, students come to understand their own personal experiences in the world (Freire, 2001). Unlike African-centered teaching the educational site does not have to be independent of the public school system, any educational site can serve as a space in which meanings are made, politics are negotiated and knowledge is constructed.

Critical race pedagogy can be traced back to two genealogical roots: critical race theory (see chapter 2) and critical pedagogy. Critical theory, specifically the works of

Paulo Freire (1998), advocates that oppression is not a “closed world from which there is no exit, but is a limiting situation that can be transformed” (p. 50). Thus, critical pedagogues foster environments in which active, dialogical, critical and stimulating methods are encouraged (Freire, 1998). In addition, critical pedagogues give serious attention to issues of power and the struggles that have historically shaped the voices, meaning and experiences of marginalized groups (Ball, 2000). In the schooling context, this could lead to students who understand and believe in the transformative power of critical reflection and dialogue. Thus, students learn how to perceive themselves in the world, differently, and, in turn, develop the capacities to accomplish their goals.

Lynn (1999) in his exploratory study of the teaching practices of Black teachers, employed both Afrocentric methods and critical race paradigms to examine politically-active teachers of color. He found that his participants taught children the importance of Black culture by encouraging and supporting dialogue in the classroom; engaging daily self-affirmation exercises; and actively and consistently resisting and challenging authorities who advocate practices that are hegemonic and counter-emancipatory. In addition, these teachers employed dialogical techniques that encouraged critical thinking and a critical consciousness.

In this case Lynn’s work is valuable in that it demonstrates not only culturally-relevant teaching practice, but it also demonstrates explicit transformative teaching practices for Black children. This is important because one critique of critical [race] theory is its application to classroom practice (Ball, 2000). By presenting these Black

teachers as social actors who resist and counter the hegemonic practices, Lynn (1999) provides a window into the classroom practices of critical race pedagogues.

One critical race pedagogue and her practice is also portrayed in Ball's (2000) article, *Empowering pedagogies that enhance the learning of multicultural students*. In it she analyzes and presents the discourse patterns of three African American teachers working in a community-based organization as they teach for liberation in the Freirian (2001) sense. For three years, she sought to understand how these teachers fostered environments that encouraged their students to develop individual or collective agency. She found that these teachers "operate[d] at different points along the continuum in terms of the implementation of critical pedagogy as they pressed their students to consider the possibilities" (p. 1007). Utilizing elements of critical race theory, her research was presented in the form of portraits of classroom activity in order to show the reader how classroom discourse practices move students towards agency.

According to Ball (2000), themes related to agency emerged from the literature. First, all three teachers made explicit efforts to prepare their students for the multiple roles that they might play in society. Second, all teachers encouraged agency or, in other words, these teachers shared with their students the numerous possibilities that existed for them. For instance, Mama Olivia (teacher), a critical race pedagogue in this study, teaches Black female high school aged women (audience) who were participating in an African-centered rites of passage program. While engaging them in a dialectical call and response, she demonstrates how she fosters an environment that encourages collective agency [in this abbreviated version],

**Mama Olivia:** And you see, we've made a lot of contributions to this country..in fact we built this country. We need to constantly remind people...

**Audience:** Amen! That's right, Mama Olivia...with our sweat, we built this country

**Mama Olivia:** We need to lift ourselves up and I don't think it's really brought out or brought up enough in our educational system

**Audience:** That's true

**Mama Olivia:** They don't want us to know how great we are. And, [I'm] not talking about anyone...but we need to learn about ourselves! (p.1026 )

In this case, Mama Olivia is teaching these students about collective agency and encouraging her students to develop individual agency by urging them to become more aware, more conscious and more educated. Other teachers encouraged their students by opening up the possibilities in career options or by encouraging students to exercise agency in a more specific domain.

Ball (2000) argues that these teachers spent much less time critiquing the system and more time encouraging their students to “take control of their future through knowledge acquisition” (p. 1031). However, I would contend that in the case of Mama Olivia, the Afrocentric rites of passage leader fosters an environment that encourages critical thinking and the learning of African tradition. She stresses for her students the importance of raising the levels of consciousness and the importance of exploring life's possibilities. Finally, both she and her students use race as an analytical tool not only to critique the reproduction of status quo (as illustrated in the conversation above) but also to empower themselves.

The challenge, then, is to better understand how those Black teachers working in urban schools, continue to work towards emancipation with new tools such as the Internet and computer-related technologies that can be used not only to give their students more access to knowledge, but can also be used to transform the lives of

their students. The questions in this digital age become: (a) how do Black teachers build relationships with their students using the Internet and computer-related resource; (b) how do these Black teachers encourage critical thinking using the Internet and computer-related resources (c) how do teachers find and utilize content on the Internet and through software packages in ways that demonstrate understanding and embracing of Africans living in the Diaspora and (d) what kinds of understandings, knowledge and dispositions do these Black teachers have? And, (e) how do Black teachers act as social actors who resist against the hegemonic tendencies of the dominant groups using the Internet and computer-related technologies? Although limited in scope, in this final strand of the literature review, I will provide a brief overview of the Internet and computer-related technologies and explore the literature pertaining to technology in urban schools.

*Black Teachers: Situated at the Intersection of Race, Class and Technology*

Although there are numerous studies that discuss technology, urban schools and teacher beliefs (Fulton, 1999; Van Sledright, 2001), technology and systemic urban school reform (Blumenfield, Fishman & Marx, 2000; Cuban, KirkPatrick & Peck, 2001; Johnson & Swabb, 1999; Songer, Lee & Kam, 2001); issues of access (Owston & Wideman, 2001), most germane to this proposed study are research projects that provide a rich description of urban school teachers' infusion of computer technology into classroom practice. Unfortunately, few studies marry these two concepts. It is those studies that I will explore here.

Songer, Lee, and Kam (2001) examined six, 6th grade teachers in an urban school located in Detroit. The school was characterized by limited instructional freedoms

largely due to high stakes testing, and limited access to technology. Each teacher was involved in a professional development program that explored science through inquiry called Collaborative Construction of Understanding. As part of the professional development, these teachers learned how to implement a curriculum called Kids as Global Scientists (KGS) in which students learned concepts related to weather patterns and applied weather understandings, in order to predict and interpret current weather events. They also participated in an on-line discussion thread about weather. The students used a CD-Rom “for the retrieval and presentation of multiple representations of current weather imagery and storms” to be used as backup in case the Internet was unavailable ”(p. 136). Although inadequate computer technology presented obstacles, according to Songer et al. (2001) teacher’s beliefs about the power of computer technology allowed them to be creative and persevere despite the challenges. These researchers believed that understanding the unique nature of the urban classroom was critical, therefore they “worked with [their] urban school teachers to recognize the importance of high expectations, the value of everyday experiences, the power of modeling inquiry thinking, and the importance of sharing in discussions with other learners nationwide through the KGS message board” (p. 136). In essence, these researchers underscored the importance of making KGS unit relevant to the students’ experiences.

According to Songer et al. (2001) these teachers went above and beyond to provide students with the opportunity to use computers and related technologies. For example, the limited resources challenged one teacher dealing with a large student enrollment of 34 and a computer lab with 17 computers and chairs. However, she

continued to take her students to the lab, some kneeling by the computer, some working in large groups. By the end of the KGS unit, her students, especially those with no prior experience using the Internet, learned how to explore their ideas while becoming fluent using the Internet and computer-related technologies. This study is critical because it demonstrates the desire of educators to persevere despite ongoing challenges in order to develop in their students the necessary technological skills that they need to compete in American society. These teachers' stories are very rarely represented in the literature and certainly are not captured by the statistics that speak to teachers, technology and urban schools. As a response to this study, I attempted to find out why the transformative Black teachers participating in my study infused technology into their culturally-relevant practices. What experiences informed their decision to use technology? How did transformative Black teachers in this study manage with limited technological resources? Additionally, how do teachers, who in essence, become social agents, understand the role of computer technology in preparing their students for a global workforce?

In a relevant study, Duran (1999) explored the possibilities of the Internet and other computer-related technologies by reporting its transformative effect on two groups of culturally and linguistically diverse students in Santa Barbara. One elementary school teacher, according to Duran (1999) encouraged his student, Freddy, to use the Internet to display his student work, to develop a quiz related to a hobby and to add graphics that were linked to his favorite rap and soul music. According to Duran (1999) Freddy's personal website, "Freddy's Phat Page" is a new form of electronic literacy that creates a window into "his life understandings and the

ways in which both his in school and out-of school worlds link to those understandings” (p. 221).

In another classroom in Duran’s study, teachers used technology in culturally-relevant ways to enhance instruction. Students researched on CD ROMS and the Internet in order to view multiple interpretations of interpretive narrative writings like, fairy tales. By doing this, students developed Internet researching skills in addition to critical skills that helped them to distinguish between fairytales from different countries. In addition, students presented their findings to the rest of the class. Although Duran’s study is helpful in that he presents transformative ways of using technology in the classroom, he fails to discuss these teachers’ purposes for utilizing technology and the challenges that these teachers faced. Based on this observation, I sought to find out, what could it mean for these teachers, in urban schools, to utilize the Internet and computer-related technologies in their practice. How does the integration of technology change their teaching practice? What are the specific challenges that these teachers face? How does the integration of computer technology transform their students?

Perhaps the greatest contribution made to the concept of culturally-relevant teaching and technology can be attributed to Pinkard (1999), who designed culturally-relevant computer-based software. By computer-based software, I mean that this technology can be used without the assistance of a teacher and this software does not require an Internet connection. Pinkard (1999) sought to understand the relationship between learning to read and two culturally responsive computer-based software programs, *Say, Say Oh Playmate* and *Rappin’ Reader*. Both computer-based

programs are rooted in the assumption that students use oracy as a scaffold for text that is contextually familiar. Both programs are targeted to low-socioeconomic status elementary aged Black children and those students who “rap music and clap routines are a part of everyday lived experience” (p. 6).

*Say Say Oh Playmate*, the most current and widely used software, is a computer-based program designed for students with low reading motivational skills. It consists of traditional African American rap routines like Miss Mary Mack. Furthermore, the interface purposely captures the students’ neighborhood environment so that there is immediate congruence between these students’ lives and the software program. According to Pinkard (1999), the purpose of this software is two-fold. First, students are expected to reconstruct familiar text. Second, students are expected to write a song. Pinkard conducted a study to find out if the effectiveness of *Say Say Oh Playmate*. Participants included twelve African American students from an urban after school mentoring program. Research questions included,

- Do children improve their sight vocabulary by using *Say, Say Oh Playmate*?
- Does the use of a culturally responsive interface affect children motivation to use *Say Say Oh Playmate*?
- Do children use their prior knowledge of clap lyrics as a scaffold?
- Can *Say Say Oh Playmate* motivate children who dislike reading to perform activities that rely on reading skills?

Data collection included pre-interview, post-interview, pre-test and post test.

Pinkard (1999) found that all students demonstrated gains from pre-test to post-test. Furthermore, she found that students in her study favored this software over other educational software. Pinkard believes that this study sheds light on the value of culturally-relevant learning software. She contends that students were motivated to learn because the computer program built on the knowledge and cultural experiences

that these students brought to the classroom. In a sense, the study found that combining computer software with culturally-relevant content leads to greater academic achievement, positive self worth, and greater motivation to complete tasks. Although this is a critical step towards marrying the concepts of culturally-relevant teaching and computers as a cognitive tool, utilizing a program that is computer-based negates the purpose of having a teacher in the classroom. I believe that teachers must integrate computer technology into their teaching practice. Also, I would argue that three reasons account for the increase in student motivation and achievement. First, students saw positive images of themselves and their environment in the software. Second, this software drew on students various learning styles (e.g. visual, kinesthetic, auditory, and tactile).<sup>5</sup> Third, the delivery of the content was built on students' prior knowledge. Based on this study, I wanted to know how culturally-relevant Black teachers connected the technology to their students' lives? In addition, I observed how Black educators used technologies to support the learning styles of their students.

In another study, Pinkard explains that her culturally-relevant computer-based software can become a catalyst for teachers to recognize the importance of infusing culturally-relevant principles into classroom practice. Using case methods, Pinkard (in press) studied the teaching practices of a White teacher who incorporated culturally responsive technology in her class. Pinkard tells that this teacher, initially, exhibited low expectations for one of her Black male students (who did not like reading) and therefore did not encourage him in the same way she pushed her other

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<sup>5</sup> See Janice Hale Benson, Cherry Gooden and Barbara Shade for more information about learning style theory and Black children.

students. Pinkard later observed that when the teacher introduced culturally-responsive technology, one Black male student became intrinsically motivated. The teacher, noticing her student's excitement about the technology, began to inquire about other ways to connect her curriculum to her students' lives using technology.

Pinkard revealed that this teacher searched the website for clip art that mirrored African American culture. In addition, she began to have her students write autobiographies. This led to an assignment requiring students to interview the elderly people in their community about their lives and experiences. Thus, culturally responsive technology led this teacher to transform her teaching in such a way that she began connecting her classroom instruction to the lives of her students. Here we see a teacher who initially seemed to be holding low expectations for her students and who was not pushing her students to achieve academically. After using this software program, she came to understand the importance of culturally-relevant teaching while simultaneously enhancing her teaching using technology. As a result, she became more cognizant and reflective about how she was impeding her Black male students' success.

Much can be gained by reading Pinkard's account of this White teacher's experiences infusing technology and how culturally-relevant teaching impacted her Black male student. While this study does begin to merge the two ideals, culturally-relevant teaching and technology infused as a cognitive tool, there is still much more to understand. I examined what this teaching looked like if teachers were connected to the community from which these students lived? What did culturally-relevant,

computer-enhanced teaching look like if the educator saw teaching as a political act that necessitated these Black children being grounded in their ancestry?

### *Summary and Relevance to the Study*

This literature review is an attempt to cull two seemingly disjointed bodies of literature: Black teachers' progressive practices and uses of technology in urban schools. I began with an examination of the urban school context and an explication of the theoretical framework which informs the present study. Next, I briefly explored the representations of Black teachers in the literature, arguing for the necessity of re-presenting Black teachers in ways that guard against one dimensional and negative images. My attention shifted to the new challenge for Black teachers brought upon by the Digital Age. Issues of access to the Internet and computer-related technologies commonly called the "digital divide" is a symptom of a larger socio-political and socio-historical context that maintains and perpetuates racism, classism and sexism. However, despite these challenges, I demonstrated that within schools, teachers embrace culturally-relevant teaching practices that symbolize teaching that is grounded in Black children's experiences, connected to the community, fostered in environments that encourage critical thinking and imparted with care while simultaneously holding high expectations for their students. Finally, I explored the rather limited research on technology and urban schools contending that there is a need to further understand the lived experiences of Black teachers who use technology in transformative ways in the urban context.

Given this limited literature in culturally-relevant uses of computer technology, I studied the teaching experiences and practices of transformative Black educators who not only enhance their teaching by using technology, but also simultaneously empower their Black students. By studying their practices, Black teachers can provide invaluable insight into how they understand progressive teaching practice, how they make meaning of computer technology and how they work successfully within complex urban contexts. Much can be learned by examining the practices of culturally-relevant teachers since this could raise the level of consciousness for teachers who express uncertainty about using computers in their classroom; as well, this could add to the body of literature on culturally-relevant teaching practices for Black students.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Unveiling the Lives and Practices of Black Teachers in Inner-Urban Schools: Methodology**

##### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter, I shed light on how Black teachers created spaces and still create spaces for their Black children to learn in spite of ongoing barriers and challenges of access to knowledge. In the tradition of my teacher-ancestors, I continue the legacy by challenging dominant constructions of what counts as knowledge and how one comes to know. Like the transformative Black teachers in this study, I am also committed to liberatory practices that re-present the lives and experiences of people of African descent. As a Black teacher, teacher educator and researcher, my role, in this study, is to illuminate counter-stories about the transformative teaching philosophies, practices and lives of Black teachers who utilize computer technology and work in inner-urban schools. In turn, my method creates spaces for the ngona (counter-stories) of Black teachers to be re-presented in authentic ways. My research, therefore, becomes more than a record of Black teachers' experiences; it is a critical storytelling that becomes a method of empowerment (Denzin, 2000) by transforming both public and private spheres.

This chapter provides a detailed description of my methodology and research methods for unveiling these ngona (counter stories). First, I elucidate the research setting and site. This discussion is followed by a rationale for using case study method to examine the teaching practices of four the transformative Black teachers

enhancing their classroom practice by using technology. I conclude by presenting the data sources and method of analysis.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used relationally to my data in this interpretive case study approach. I use CRT as a theoretical perspective because as proposed by Denzin (2000), this study is grounded in the belief that my research: (a) is a political and ethical statement; (b) should interrogate stereotypes and forefront the lived experiences of marginalized groups (c) should employ dialogue and ethics of personal responsibility; (d) should be implemented as and with an emancipatory agenda; and, (d) should emphasize collective empowerment.

Because I believe that the identity of the researcher greatly influences the research she/he conducts, I present my biography at the onset of this journey as a way of making my values explicit. In the article, *The lives and values of researchers, implications for educating citizens in a multicultural society*, Banks(1998) confirms that the biographical journeys of researchers are greatly influenced by “their values, their research questions, and the knowledge that they construct” (p. 4).

As a child, I was quite disenchanted with my “schooling” experience. I was, for the most part, one of a handful of African American children attending predominately White schools. The teacher-directed instruction and traditional textbooks did little to validate my “brown” experience in the classroom. In fact, I could never understand why my cultural experience was largely ignored throughout my elementary and secondary school matriculation. I distinctly recall the kinds of representations used to show people of color, and more specifically Black culture. African tribal societies, referred to by many as ‘primitive’ or ‘natives’ wearing little

to no garb in magazines like *National Geographic*, starving Ethiopians that needed to be saved, poor black ghetto children in urban environments with no fathers or marijuana-smoking Rastas were dominant images of how African Americans were discussed throughout my schooling process. Very rarely was a person of African descent, aside from Martin Luther King Jr., mentioned as a cultural hero. Where were the explanation and the critique of the enslavement of African people in the history textbook? Why were the images of people of color and women in the textbooks flat and one-dimensional? Why was European culture presented as one that all people should emulate? As a result, I experienced a disconnect between what I was learning and who I was.

This disconnect continued until I attended Hampton University, a historically Black university in Hampton, Virginia. As a psychology major, I was introduced to a body of research conducted by African Americans that told a very different story than I had been exposed to in schools. I found a critique of institutionalized racism. I found research by or about people of color representing their diverse realities. Most important, I found a connection between what I was studying and who I was. I learned that these representations of indigenous people as well as African Americans were largely a consequence of white imperialism; in essence these images were socially constructed to present Africans as different and more specifically deviant. I now realize that producing stereotypical images of Africans as primitive and Blacks in America as ignorant, helps individuals who do not want to understand the complexities of race, class, gender and other social constructions establish a perception of people of African descent in America and across the world (Collins,

1998). In retrospect, I also realize that the kind of information disseminated throughout my schooling experience was not neutral or the “Truth.” Rather, it was one telling of a grand narrative created to maintain current ideologies that reinforce the unequal power relations in American society. And that with/in the production of knowledge,

No one group has a clear angle of vision. No one group possesses the theory or methodology that allows it to discover the absolute “truth” or, worse yet, proclaim its theories and methodologies as the universal norm evaluating other groups or experiences (Hill-Collins, 1990, p.234-235).

Like Hill-Collins, I believe that knowledge is situated and deeply connected to the creator of those ideas. Therefore, I agree with those who subscribe to the notion that standpoint is partial--multiple groups each with varying experiences with penalty and privilege produce corresponding partial perspectives-situated knowledges. This situated knowledge or standpoint (Weber, 2001; Hill-Collins, 1991) is informed by the interlocking systems of race, class, gender, sexuality with special attention paid to issues of power. These situated knowledges, explored in their entirety, tell part of a story, but they are not *the* story. In turn, I acknowledge all of my situated knowledges that include being African American, a woman, a healer, a researcher, and an activist. In the long tradition of Black women who argue that their standpoint represents a legitimate way of knowing, these subjectivities are with/in me in the research process and product (Wolcott, 1997) of this qualitative study.

Before I provide a discussion of the unfolding of my research, I will first turn to a description of the context in which I conducted the study, Roosevelt Public Schools.

*The Research Context: Roosevelt Public Schools*

Roosevelt City Public Schools, located in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, is an urban school district that comprises multi-lingual, multiethnic students speaking over 100 languages and dialects (Roosevelt publication, 2001). Currently, Roosevelt supports over 70,000 students in 146 schools among which 81% of those students are eligible for free and/or reduced lunch program. Like most urban school districts, many of the African American students are segregated into all-black school institutions, especially those located in the Southern part of the city. In Chapter 4, I provide a detailed description of Roosevelt city as well as the emergence of its segregated school system.

As evidenced in Chapter 2, urban schools face complex and multi-faceted challenges that range from low student achievement scores to limited resources. Roosevelt City Public Schools was no different. At the time of the study, the atmosphere in Roosevelt public schools was filled with pressure and tension. With the appointment of an acting superintendent, the system was striving to transition from a “crisis [situation] to a future of promise” (Roosevelt City Public Schools publication, 2001). Roosevelt City Public School administrators focused on holding schools more accountable for increasing student performance, attendance rates and parental involvement. This heavy focus on accountability weighed heavily on principals and teachers. Furthermore, district office staff and teachers were being reassigned or dismissed at increasingly high rates with the hope of attracting more qualified and diverse talent. In fact, Jones, one of the transformative teachers in this study, received three dismissal notices during the time that I observed her classroom

practice. Each time she received a notice, she and the vice principal appealed to the central administration and the decision was reversed. Media reports revealed that in many of the schools, morale of administrators and teachers is low, largely due to reduction in staff (Ask the Superintendent TV show, 2002).

Like most urban schools, student achievement presented a distinct challenge to this urban school system. Although results from the past four years of Stanford-9 testing in math and reading demonstrate a slight increase in test scores, student performance is still low. For example, in 2003, 43% and 78% of students scored below basic in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics examinations respectively, and 23% and 54% of all students score below basic in reading examinations in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Test scores revealed that there was a steady increase in below basic scores in both reading and mathematics as students matriculated through the system. Therefore, the primary focus in Roosevelt City Public Schools remained to increase the standardized test scores of all students, especially secondary students, who did not perform well on the examination. As evidenced by a quote from the Superintendent in the local newspaper at that time, “We are still an urban school district and we still have a long way to go. We still have too many schools scoring lower than average” (Roosevelt Chronicle, 2002).

Urban and inner-urban inequity access to the Internet and computer-related technologies was also a major challenge in Roosevelt Public Schools. The director of technology, John Brown, shared that in most schools, the computer to student ratio was well below that of surrounding school districts. Additionally, he (1999) found himself constantly contending with computers that were aging, and though functional,

“fail[ing] to provide authentic learning experiences” (p. 3). He shared that many Roosevelt teachers employed traditional ways of utilizing computer technology by concentrating on basic skills through drill and repetition. He added that although these methods might help to increase scores on standardized tests, these techniques do little to develop critical thinking skills.

Despite resource challenges, Brown steadily encouraged teachers to develop their technological skills by participating in professional development sessions. For example, for participating in a series of workshops, he provided each teacher with three Macintosh computers for elementary and middle schools and three IBM and three Pentiums for high schools, in addition to the necessary software. Each workshop, delivered by a representative of Apple computers, provided teachers with training that focused on helping teachers integrate technology into their classroom practice. Workshops were designed to be ongoing, throughout the year and provided only on the volunteer basis. Equally as important, Brown selected several Roosevelt Public school teachers whom he refers to as “star teachers” who used the Internet and computer-related technologies in exemplary ways, as models for other teachers in the district. Since Brown is mindful that schools serve as the only access point for technology and the Internet for children from low-income families, he worked diligently to write grant proposals not only to attain computer-related software and hardware, but also to increase the kind of professional development opportunities for teachers. For instance, in the last two years, Brown has provided online professional development for K-6 teachers. As a result of fiscal constraints, he has not been able to provide training for teachers in grades 7-12. To supplement the on-line

professional development, Brown works in conjunction with Teachscape, to provide an on-line course for all the teachers working in the system.

Brown found that his role as Director of Instructional Technology was difficult due to a limited budget. He was not staffed to handle all of the ongoing responsibilities that the job entails such as technical support, professional development and the purchasing of updated technologies; therefore his office always functioned at a deficit. Furthermore, Brown explained that his funding was considerably less than neighboring suburban counties, Buxton and Elizabeth Counties. Whereas Brown's instructional technology budget was approximately 1.2 million dollars, the suburban neighboring district of Buxton County technology coordinator managed a budget in excess of approximately 23 million while Elizabeth County's technology budget was well over 45 million dollars per year. The limited funding directly impacts Roosevelt students' access to and experiences with instructional computers.

Although Roosevelt students have access to the Internet and computer-related technologies, at the time of the study access was less than the national average (Technology Counts, 2001). In general, 92 percent of all Roosevelt schools had Internet connectivity. Within schools, there was a 1:5 ratio of instructional computers to Roosevelt student as compared to a 1:4 ratio nationally. Instructional computers differ from multi-media computers, in that they are computers that include sound cards and a CD ROM that can assist teachers in the classroom.

Access to instructional computer technology between poorer children of color than more affluent students, within the school district, was also unequal. Overall,

poor children and children of color in Roosevelt Public schools were less likely than their White peers to have access to the Internet in individual classrooms and in the school as a whole (Technology Counts, 2001). These statistics remind us that many Black teachers and students located in the most desperate areas of Roosevelt Public schools coped with either limited or inferior computer technology resources or no access altogether (Technology Counts, 2001).

### *Developing a Research Agenda*

At the onset of this study, I talked to many teacher-colleagues in Roosevelt Public schools and elsewhere, attended several conferences such as the annual meeting of American Educational Research Association and Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology and read books and articles on the "digital divide." Although many Black community members were concerned with the question of equal access to technology, other forward thinkers raised the question of what happens when computer technology is present in the classroom? Furthermore, the question was asked, how will the Internet content and computer-related technologies be used in *culturally-responsive ways*? This study rested at the intersections of these questions, because both prove to be both timely and crucial to the education of Black children.

During the spring of 2002, I conducted a pilot study at Western High School to get a sense of what was happening in the inner-urban classroom while a Black teacher used computer technology in her classroom practice. I studied the teaching practice of a Black 'culturally-relevant,' graphic arts teacher, Kathy Jones, who worked collaboratively with the history and English teachers to infuse technology

into her African-centered instruction. The purpose of that study was: 1) to demonstrate how this teacher's life experiences influenced her practice, and 2) to explore how culturally-relevant teaching, when merged with computer-enhanced instruction, met the educational needs of African American students attending urban schools. During this pilot, I immersed myself in Jones's classroom practice for over three months, 'hanging out,' getting to know her students, participating in class discussions, observing the way that she infused computer technology. Additionally, I attempted to learn about her life experiences.

That pilot study led me to refine my research. First, although I observed in Jones' classroom approximately once a week for a few hours throughout the semester, I realized that I needed to spend more time immersed in Jones's classroom in order to capture her behavior patterns and her ways of teaching. For example, during the pilot study, I had difficulty isolating the role of technology in her classroom practice since her classroom practice was complicated and layered. In addition, I was unable to explore how Jones managed the inferior technology or dealt with challenges due to lack of upkeep and maintenance. Moreover, I was unable to discern who (Western High School or Roosevelt City Public Schools) provided support for Jones when she encountered technical difficulty or when she needed professional development. Since Jones' curriculum was designed in thematic units, I was unable to observe the entire teaching and learning process, because I only saw glimpses of the process and the final product. Therefore, prolonged and daily observation of the complete thematic unit taught by progressive Black teachers would

be more helpful to understanding their experiences and classroom practices utilizing computer technology

### *Research Questions*

The main research question was: *How do transformative Black teachers in urban schools educate their students by using computer technology in their teaching practice?* Since the construct of teaching practice is complex and multifaceted, the subsidiary questions were designed to further excavate the specific classroom practices, in turn, enabling me to sufficiently respond to my guiding research question. Hence, my subsidiary questions were as follows:

#### *Relationships*

(a) In what ways do Black teachers make connections to their students and to the community in which their students live by using the Internet and computer-related technologies?

#### *Knowledge*

(b) What are these Black teachers' conceptions of knowledge as it relates to the Internet and computer-related technologies?

#### *Curriculum*

(c) How do progressive Black teachers use the Internet and computer related technologies in ways that demonstrate an understanding and embracing of Africa and the Diaspora?

#### *Dispositions*

(d) What kinds of dispositions do Black teachers who use the Internet and computer-related technologies in urban schools embody?

#### *Perspectives*

(e) What are progressive Black teachers' perspectives of the role of the Internet and computer-related technologies in teaching?

In the following section I further elaborate my subsidiary questions.

**1. In what ways did Black teachers make connections to their students and to the community in which their students live by using the Internet and computer-related technologies?**

This first question aimed to understand how Black teachers built connections with their Black students in the context of a computer-technology enhanced classroom. I attempted to find out if these teachers saw themselves as part of the community and if so, how computer technology was understood within that context. I explored how these teachers constructed their computer enhanced teaching practices in ways that were congruent to the structure and norms of their students and to the community. And, given that access to computer technology represented a major challenge for the Black community as a whole, I interrogated if and how parents and other members of the community were involved in the learning process of their children?

## **2. What were these Black teachers' conceptions of knowledge as it relates to the Internet and computer-related technologies?**

This question sought to understand how transformative Black teachers constructed knowledge with regard to the Internet and other computer-technology. In essence, I wanted to know how knowledge was generated in the classroom as it related to computer technology. By whom? And, for what purposes? I explored if and how transformative Black teachers utilized the Internet and computer-related technologies to gain access to knowledge and information in ways that they believe could transform the lives of Black students. In addition, I wanted to understand how knowledge was constructed between teacher and student pertaining to the Internet and other computer-related technologies.

**3.) How do progressive Black teachers use the Internet and computer-related technologies in ways that demonstrate an understanding and embracing of Africa and the Diaspora?**

The core of this study was centered on the transformative teaching practices of Black teachers. This question sought to unravel dimensions of teaching practices by looking specifically at the ways that teachers grounded the computer-enhanced curriculum and instruction in the lives as well as the communities of their Black students. The focus here was on the content of the computer-enhanced curriculum and instruction. I tried to understand how computer technology was utilized to help students better understand their cultural selves as well as those living in the Diaspora. In addition, I wanted to know how complex issues like race and racism were thought about and discussed in relation to the Internet and computer-related technologies.

**4) What kinds of dispositions do Black teachers who use the Internet and computer-related technologies in urban schools embody?**

Researchers suggest that caring and high expectations were dispositions that were readily displayed in culturally-relevant teaching. I wanted to uncover the kinds of dispositions embodied by transformative Black teachers whose teaching practices were enhanced with computer technology. I also sought to understand what kinds of dispositions were manifested when these teachers negotiate within contexts with limited resources or non-functioning computers?

**5) What are transformative Black teachers' perspectives of the role of technology in teaching?**

Over the last four years, standards-based reform efforts have placed increasing pressures on teachers to not only transform their teaching, but to develop in students the necessary skills to compete in the information age. In addition, school districts, across the country are developing local computer technology standards that determine what students would need to know and be able to do throughout elementary and secondary schools. Alongside issues specific to the Black community such as access to technology and access to knowledge, the question became what were transformative, Black teachers' perspectives of the ever-changing role of the Internet and computer-technology. I was particularly interested in the diverse perspectives in varying educational contexts. For example, "computer technology" within the context of an African-centered secondary classroom may elicit different meanings than in an elementary public school. Therefore, in order to glean in understanding of the intent, purposes and role of Black teachers' use of technology in the urban classroom, I planned to explicitly interrogate how teachers made meaning of computer technology. Finally, I looked specifically at ways these transformative teachers, as social actors, resisted or negotiated prevailing negative dominant ideologies about Black students by utilizing the Internet and computer-related strategies.

I expected these research questions to evolve, over time, to reflect the kinds of themes that emerge from my time spent in the field. However, I found that throughout this study, my research questions remained constant. I added two dimensions to my data collection process. Realizing the significance of racism in their lives, I spent more time than expected attempting to understand the childhood

and professional experiences of the transformative teachers in my study. This enabled me to render a richer telling of their lives as Black teachers who utilized computer technology in transformative ways. Also, historically contextualizing Western, Clinton and Ward schools as well as the classroom context of the transformative teachers in this study became important. Therefore, I added a chapter that focused on the development of Black segregated schools in Roosevelt City Public School system.

#### *Case Study: A Research Strategy*

Given that I was interested in capturing the lives, experiences and teaching practices of transformative Black teachers' practice, an interpretive case study methodology, a qualitative research approach, was best suited for this study. This methodology also enabled me to compare and contrast the diverse ways these teachers constructed "transformative teaching" for Black students using computer technology.

Qualitative research is an over-arching research approach that seeks to help researchers understand or explain the meaning of social phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1998), under the umbrella term of qualitative research, case study research strategy is utilized to gain "an in-depth understanding of a situation and meaning for those involved" (p. 19). Case study is often the preferred method when process questions such as "why" or "how" are being posed (Yin, 1994).

What distinguishes a case study research approach from other qualitative studies, however, is its specific and bounded system (Stake, 2000). These cases were bounded by various factors such as the focus on Black teachers and students, computer technology and inner-urban schools. The study presented cases of the

experiences and practices of transformative Black teachers who infused technology into their teaching. I aimed to examine how they constructed their teaching practice for Black students. Therefore, I focused on how they built relationships with students, why they made particular curricular choices, as well as their perspectives of teaching. Cases also operate within a particular context (Stake, 2000). Here, I considered the context of the Roosevelt urban classroom. In particular, I examined how the particular socio/political, cultural context and structural constraints directly impacted these Black teachers' classroom practice.

Each transformative teacher was referred to me based on criteria developed from the literature on culturally-relevant teaching. More details will be given later in this chapter. In order to document their practice, each teacher agreed to participate in both formal and informal interviews as well as classroom observations. Additionally, I audiotaped all interactions with the participant. Like other emancipatory research, my interviews were carried out in an interactive, dialogic manner that elicited self-disclosure on my part in order to arrive at mutual understandings between myself and the Black teacher (Lather, 1991). At the onset of this study, I believed that these Black teachers were best capable of making sense of their classroom practice. Although I analyzed the data, I continued to gain clarity about each teacher's practice through constant conversation and questioning. Each of the four cases is presented as a counter-story or *ngona*. A counter-story is a method of telling the stories of marginalized groups that are not often told. The larger purpose of counter-storytelling the experiences of "unheard" groups is to "strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival and resistance (Solorzano & Yasso, 2002 p. 32).

### Teacher Selection

Purposeful sampling was crucial to the selection of my participants. As Merriam (1998) explains, purposeful sampling is used when an investigator wants to “discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p.61). The following criteria were used to select “transformative” Black teachers:

- Black teachers who understood and embraced African American culture in their curriculum and in their instruction.
- Black teachers who worked diligently to counter barriers to accessing knowledge.
- Black teachers who taught in culturally-responsive ways and manifested dispositions that led students to believe in themselves and their abilities.
- Black teachers who used the Internet and computer-related technologies to enhance their teaching practice in all Black inner-urban classrooms.

These criteria were adapted from Ladson-Billings model of cultural relevant teaching, a theory congruent with how I viewed “good teaching” for Black students<sup>6</sup>.

I attempted to use Foster’s (1995) process of *community nomination* to select my participants. Foster relied on recommendations from parents, administrators and other teachers in the school to help her locate exemplary teachers for her students. Since I was not allowed access to Roosevelt City Public Schools until December, I had to rely on the process of school nomination to gather participants for my study.

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<sup>6</sup> Although there many models of good teaching (Akoto, 1988; Porter & Brophy, 1988; Shulman, 1987), I based my criteria for the selection of transformative Black teachers on Ladson Billings model of culturally-relevant teaching because this model is specifically geared successful teaching practice for Black children. This model includes both the “political and the practical.” In other words, this teaching model encompasses the kind of teaching that prepares Black students academically and helps these students make sense of their world and larger social structures.

In this case, I asked both central office and school administrators, in addition to teachers for recommendations of educators who would fit my criteria.

As I was interested in understanding the teaching practices of transformative teachers who worked within an African-centered urban context, I spoke with several African-centered educators and two principals working in Independent schools. They referred me to Kofi Jefferson, principal and teacher at Sankofa Academy, a Roosevelt City private school. After a few phone conversations, Kofi seemed to be an excellent candidate for the study. Since Kofi always integrated technology into his thematic units, he allowed me to enter into his school immediately. I started observations in his school on November 1, 2002.

Finding the rest of the participants for my study proved to be an exciting experience. Jones, the teacher in my pilot study agreed to participate and became the second teacher to participate in my study. Stan Brown, Director of Instructional Technology, helped me locate Michael St. John. During a Roosevelt technology coordinator meeting held in January, Brown read the participant criteria aloud to the coordinators and asked for referrals. Only one coordinator, Latanya Reed, came forth to announce that she had the perfect teacher for the study, St. John. Brown called me the following day to set up a meeting with both Reed and St. John who taught at Clinton Diagnostic Center, the only school designated for “emotionally disturbed” students attending Roosevelt City Public Schools. At the time, I had not considered the possibility of including a special education population. I immediately scheduled a meeting time to meet with both Reed and St. John. During the meeting I explained the study and gave each of them a copy of my research proposal. Shortly thereafter, I

asked him to participate in the study. He agreed. I began observing his classroom practice January, 20, 2003.

Brown recommended one other teacher to the study, Harry Myte. He and the librarian at Garvey Elementary School, Samatha Little, were active members of the Roosevelt 'Star teacher' program, which supported exemplary teachers who integrated technology into their teaching practice. As mentioned previously, star teachers worked with Brown throughout the year on various technology projects. During our first conversation, Myte and Little expressed that they recently applied for and received a grant from the Roosevelt Chronicle Grants for the Arts Program to produce a computer generated book about historical Black homes in Roosevelt City. In the grant they described their thematic unit as:

This project is designed to make students' aware of the Historic Black residences in and around our community. We will use our newest technology and research techniques to construct a book about Historic Black Americans that have lived in Roosevelt city.

This unit description, along with their passion and their desire to write a grant to make this project a reality made this team a good fit for the study. However, after further observation and reflection, I realized that they did not fit my criteria for two reasons. First, there was little teacher/student interaction. Second, I did not observe the teachers educating in culturally-responsive ways. Therefore, they were not pursued.

In late January, I heard about a teacher, Sean Smith, who taught in transformative ways. Although, I originally wanted four teachers, I was open to adding other transformative Black teachers to my study. However, within minutes of meeting Smith, I realized that although his focus and pedagogical style was congruent

to my study, he rarely used computer technology. His mediums of choice were pen and paint. After looking over the criteria, Smith referred me to Christina Cooper. He fervently expressed that I “must have Cooper in [my] study.” I called her immediately and explained my research agenda. She responded emphatically, “I too have an issue with the under-representation of Black teachers in research. I would be very interested in speaking with you. Call me tonight at home.” After a long conversation that evening, she became the fourth and last participant in my study.

### *Sources of Data*

In order to document these Black teachers’ classroom practice, I needed a variety of data sources. In addition to observing thematic units, I conducted a series of formal and informal interviews in order to better understand how each teacher constructed his/her teaching practice. I took detailed notes of all classroom observations and catalogued each observation, interview and relevant notes for organizational purposes. I supplemented my observations and interviews by examining and recording the material culture. Material culture refers to classroom documents such as curricular material and student work. In the following section, I elaborate on the aforementioned dimensions of the study: selection of participants, “observation of participation,” interviews and dialogue, and material cultural.

### “Observations of Participation” of Thematic Units

The unit of analysis, which refers to the phenomenon being studied, was defined as the experiences and practices of transformative Black teachers who enhanced their classroom practice by utilizing computer technology. I conducted

observations of Jones, Kofi, Cooper, St. John over the course of one thematic unit paying particular attention to their uses of technology and the context with which they work. A thematic unit was defined as multiple lesson plans and/or cross curricular activities based on a theme. I examined the role of computer technology, the nature of the discourse, the dynamics of the classroom, the connections to Black students, the dispositions of each teacher as well as how these teachers manage with more technical aspects of computer technology within a bounded context. Thematic units lasted between two weeks and four months.

Keeping in mind that “observations of participation” should be prolonged and repetitive, I was completely immersed in the research context over the course of one thematic unit, paying specific attention to the computer-enhanced classroom practice of transformative Black teachers (see Appendix A). During this period, I observed the following activities:

1. Classroom dynamics (e.g., The interaction between instructor and students. The interaction between student and student. The interaction between instructor and computer technology. The interaction between student and technology.)
2. Classroom discourse patterns (e.g., content, constructions of Blackness, computer technology)
3. Class activities (e.g., teaching, teaching goals, organization of the lessons, integration of computer technology)
4. Physical setting (e.g., technology resources, classroom setup)

I explored these teachers’ technology-enhanced classroom practices situated within the social realities associated with many urban schools. More specifically, I examined how these Black teachers negotiated instances in which resources were limited, broken or inferior. When appropriate, I used technical devices such as cameras,

audiotapes, video-tapes and field-based instruments in order to capture the more nuanced data often difficult to collect manually (Spindler & Spindler, 1987).

I called the aforementioned methods of collecting data “observations of participation,” as opposed to the more traditional qualitative term of participant observation. According to Agar (1996), participant observation is defined as “raw material of ethnographic research [lying] out there in the daily activities of the people you are interested in, and the only way to access those activities is to establish relationships with people, participate with them in what they do, and observe what is going on” (p. 31). Using this definition, the researcher is actively involved in the culture of the participants while at the same time observing the interaction of the participants in order to ascertain the nuances of the particular cultures way of life. However, I would argue that the researcher is actively engaged in the culture and /or the context “out there” and the researcher’s mere presence immediately changes the dynamic of that culture. The researcher, then, becomes a part of the cultural context.

On several occasions, I participated in the class discussions, alongside my participants, asserting my viewpoint and understandings of concepts. In Kofi’s class, for example, during a discussion about the differences between liberal and vocational education, I offered ways of distinguishing between the two ways of thinking about teaching for Black folks during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the following excerpt illustrates:

Kofi: Does anyone know the difference between a liberal arts education and a vocational education? Those are the two major headings for Washington and Dubois--a liberal arts educational and a vocational education. Okay, listen very carefully to Baba Agyei and he will give you some clarity on that.

Baba Agyei: Vocational is more manual using your hands; vocational may deal with agricultural and farming. Nowadays, we might have job studies on

the job training. Also, they have schools where kids will grow up and learn different trades, carpentry, things of that nature. On the other hand, when dealing with liberal arts, you are dealing with philosophy; you are talking about the science learning business. A lot of this has to do with you social status, your financial status and your economic status in this country. Whether you are going to be a white color or blue color worker in this country... if you have people who are going to make a certain kind of [salary]—that is where the difference comes in.

Kofi: Okay, now listen to what Baba said, I am going to school and I want to be a plumber what kind of education will I receive Hassiss?

Hassiss: mechanical?

Teacher: I want to be a plumber...

Kwabena and Asa: vocational

Kofi: .Okay, thank you brothers. Okay, I am going to school and I want to be a lawyer, what kind of education will I receive? Alesha what category will that fall under? Please think about what I am saying—the two topics are vocational and liberal education. Okay, Alesia, I am going to school and I want to be a doctor.

Alesia: liberal education.

Kofi: Thank you. I am going to school and I want to be an electrician?

Gary...go ahead and help her out.

Gary: Vocational

Kofi: Very good. I am going to school and I want to be a teacher. So you understand both categories, because these categories are going to become important later as you start to do the work at the end of the chapter.

Brother K: You may want to think about your trade. Basically, how they categorize is vocational and liberal.

*In my field notes I wrote: the students next to me are having a really interesting discussion about whether architecture is a manual or liberal arts education. One student is arguing that you use your hands, therefore architecture requires a manual education. Other students are arguing that it requires schooling, therefore it would qualify as liberal arts.*

Rona: (After listening to the students' side conversation, I contribute to the whole class discussion) So, an easy way to think about this is vocational is manual labor, when you think of manual labor what is that? A manual education would mean learning to use your hands. When higher order thinking and philosophy is involved that would be considered liberal arts or liberal education. (turning to the students next to me I added) The theory and design of architecture would require a liberal training. The learning of the hands-on construction of a building would be considered manual education.

Kofi: Better, better? You are developing an understanding. So you see why Washington had to take this position in the South. Washington was saying we do not need anyone studying philosophy down here. We need some workers, we need someone who is going to make some furniture; we need someone who is going to plow this soil and get some crops growing. We don't need anyone studying any philosophy. Whereas Dubois was coming from the New

England states where people up there were using their minds. So there was a big riff.

I use this quote to demonstrate that throughout the data collection process I was cognizant of the role I played throughout classroom observations. My presence and my participation changed the class dynamics. In many cases, I served as a classroom aide, providing assistance to the teachers over the course of the instructional unit. I never assumed the position of a neutral observer located in the corner of the classroom taking field notes. Instead, I was an active member of the educational setting. I accounted for my participation in the classroom by observing and recording my presence and actions, in addition to that of the participant and students.

In agreement with Tedlock (2000), I argue that the term “participant observation” is an oxymoron because it implies simultaneous emotional involvement and objective attachment. Instead, she chooses to use the term “observation of participation” to call into question the presumed “objectivity” and the researcher as the voice of authority. This term was better suited for this case study in that I am observing my participation as well as that of my participants as we strive to understand what “computer technology” means in this urban school.

### Interviews and Dialogue

Much of this study relied on periodic formal and informal interviewing throughout the course of the thematic unit in order to further respond to my research questions. I began data collection with a pre-observation interview. During this interview, I asked each teacher to explain their thematic unit as well as to provide information pertaining to the goals, sequence, and activities of the period of instruction. I also

wanted to get a sense of teachers' understanding of their students as well as the kind of experiences their students brought with them to the classroom. In addition, each teacher discussed the potential challenges of utilizing the computer technology for the given unit. At this time, I asked questions pertaining to the classroom community (see Appendix B).

At some point during data collection, I conducted a formal open-ended interview that focused on each participant's schooling experiences, professional experiences and experiences using technology in teaching as well as beliefs about teaching, learning and Black students (see Appendix C). This interview took between two to four hours and in the case of Kofi, Cooper and St. John spanned the course of two or three days. At times, I would follow up on a childhood story or event to get a better sense of the context or the experience.

Throughout the thematic unit I conducted several informal interviews to develop a deeper understanding of classroom processes. During these interviews, I interrogated each teacher about the classroom dynamics as well as the physical setting in order to come to understand how they made sense of their teaching practice: By conducting these unstructured, open-ended informal interviews I gained insightful data that resulted in the emergence of diverse themes (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

I followed the observation of the thematic unit with more direct questions about classroom practice drawing upon specific examples from the observations in order to better understand interactions and conversations in the classroom. For example, I was intrigued by the constant use of storytelling that I observed throughout each teacher's unit. I asked Cooper about this pedagogical practice. She responded,

...Black folks—that is what we do. We tell stories ...A lot of the learning that I know from before school came from storytelling...it is a part of our culture. It is the way our history was passed down before we were reading and writing it. So it is a natural thing for teachers---Black teachers especially. ...I introduce books with stories. When you finish and you look around and you see how they respond to the stories and questions.... (her face seems to reveal an expression of “there is no better way to engage a child”)

Informal interviews provided a space where we could have ongoing conversation about why these teachers made certain pedagogical choices.

I also conducted post-observation interviews. I asked each teacher to reflect on their thematic unit and use of computer technology as well as to provide additional information that would further illuminate their teaching practice (see Appendix D). I found the post interviews especially helpful because it was my opportunity to ask unanswered questions or to gain clarity. During the interviewing process, I was mindful of each teachers’ time commitment. Most interviews were scheduled during the teacher’s break or after school.

### Material Culture

Throughout this study, I collected and analyzed documents and artifacts such as computer technology, lesson plans, homework assignments, curricular material, and class projects, paying specific attention to how teachers built connections, constructed knowledge, and designed curriculum. I used the material culture to further understand how these teachers fostered environments for their Black students to learn. In addition, I collected Roosevelt publications disseminated from the central and

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**Table 3.1: Research Questions and Data Sources**

Research Questions	Data Sources
<p><b><i>Dimensions of classroom practice:</i></b>  <b><i>Computer technology:</i></b>  <i>Relationships</i>            In what ways do Black teachers make connections to their students and to the community in which their students live by using the Internet and computer-related technologies?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom observations</li> <li>• Interview data</li> <li>• Materials from the classroom (e.g. lesson plans and curricular material)</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Knowledge</i></b>            What are these Black teachers' conceptions of knowledge as it relates to the Internet and computer-related technologies?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview data</li> <li>• Classroom observations</li> <li>• Curricular material</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Curriculum</i></b>            How do progressive Black teachers use the Internet and computer related technologies in ways that demonstrate an understanding and embracing of Africa and the Diaspora?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Material culture</li> <li>• Classroom observations</li> <li>• Interview protocol</li> <li>• Curricular material</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Dispositions</i></b>            What kinds of dispositions do Black teachers who use the Internet and computer-related technologies in urban schools embody?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview data</li> <li>• Classroom observations</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Perspective</i></b>            What are progressive Black teachers' perspectives of the role of the Internet and computer-related technologies in teaching?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview data</li> <li>• Classroom observations</li> </ul>

school offices as well as teachers' records. All documents were interpreted in relation to the situated context (Hodder, 2000).

### *Data Analysis*

Since data analysis began well before data collection was complete, I began memo writing during data collection as a beginning point for fleshing out initial themes.

Memo writing is considered an intermediate step between coding and the first draft of the completed analysis (Charmaz, 2000). This step allowed me to document and

trace my analytical development, and forced me to think about my research questions, emerging themes and interview protocols. At the same time, this process helped me to connect the lives of these Black teachers to larger social processes. The memo writing process (Charmez, 2000, pp. 517-518) helped me to (a) grapple with ideas about data; (b) to set an analytical course, (c) to refine categories; (d) to define relationships with various categories, and (e) to gain a sense of confidence in my ability to analyze data.

In addition, I kept a journal that allowed me to record both reflective and reflexive thoughts. When applicable, these reflections are threaded throughout the ngona (counter-stories), of each participant as a way of keeping the reader aware of my thoughts or reactions throughout the different phases of data collection.

I engaged in a more systematic form of data analysis that allowed me to make sense of the interview, observation and material data. According to Merriam (1998) there are two levels of analysis that comparative case study investigators must engage in to help them reveal the untold stories within the data. Those two levels of analysis include within case and across-case analysis. Each ngona (counter-story) developed as a result of a within case analysis. In chapter 9, I looked across cases to develop a way of thinking about culturally responsive teaching using computer technology.

Category construction entailed comparing and contrasting and looking for items that are like and unlike each other. I used Nvivo qualitative software to begin the process of open coding. I sifted through interviews and observation transcriptions and field notes closely examining events, sayings, actions that were found to be conceptually similar (e.g., technology as exposure, technology as exploration, fictive

kinships). I coded sentence by sentence and then by paragraph using my research questions as a guide. These codes were derived from meanings of sentences and paragraphs. Axial coding, “the process of relating categories to their subcategories” helped me to construct broader meanings of my data that would later be scaffolded into narratives (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). During this process, I grouped and sorted and classified themes searching for recurrent patterns (e.g., kinds of discourse around Blackness, interactions with students, discourse of empowerment, discourse around technology). In addition, I paid close attention to the discrepant cases in order “to learn important lessons by looking outside of the trend (Lightfoot, 1997, p. 192).” Using Inspiration, a conceptual mapping computer software program, I developed a conceptual framework for understanding the life experiences and teaching practices of the four teachers.

For the second reading of my data, I used a thematic approach. I examined interview and classroom observation transcripts, and memos of each participant’s case highlighting experiences with racism, teaching practices, life experiences, use of technology, thoughts about technology as well as views on the education of Black students. I wrote a one-two page summary that attempted to capture the essences of each participant’s experiences and practices. During this time, I coded, took more notes, and asked more questions in order to further define my categories. I then looked at preliminary open and axial codes developed through the initial coding process and compared and contrasted it to codes and themes that emerged from summaries. Repetitive phrases and recurring metaphors in both coding processes became the dominant themes in the construction of my *ngona* (counter narratives).

For example, in both coding processes, participants talked about the Internet as a means to expose students to liberating materials.

As I read and reread my data, I simultaneously searched for themes that were connected to concepts dominant in CRT literature. More specifically, I looked for the ways that race and racism played out within the lives, teaching philosophy and practices of each participant. I read these codes and analytical categories to develop and write each narrative. Ngona, (counter-stories) were given to each participant to read in order to match the findings with the reality of each teacher's lives and practices. Changes were made based on each teacher's comments. For the most part, changes in the ngona, (counter-stories) were limited to changes in dates.

In order to bring closure to the study and to thank the teachers for their participation, I planned a barbeque on September 7, 2003 called the "teacher meet and greet." I told participants that I would use this time as an opportunity for them to meet each other as well as a time for me to share preliminary findings. The impetus for the "teacher meet and greet" came from Cooper who desired to meet the other teachers participating in the study.

At this gathering, I shared my initial thoughts about their teaching practices. I began by expressing how computer technology was used as a tool to help students construct their voice. This led to participants explaining how they helped their students construct voice throughout their projects. I stated that a theme that emerged was the idea that the computer did not tell the students that they were wrong. In addition, I expressed how each teacher used computer technology as a liberating tool to meet the personal and cultural needs of their Blacks students. Jones responded that

she never thought about her use of computer technology in that way. She then explained to the other teachers how she used technology in her practice. While I talked, teachers listened and then added anecdotes about the way they used technology to meet their Black students' needs. The "teacher meet and greet" provided an opportunity for the teachers in my study to relax, talk and get to know each other. In addition, I was able to share my initial findings as a way of verifying what I saw throughout the study.

### *Summary*

In this chapter, I laid out my data collection methodology and epistemological stance. In addition, I presented my method of analysis. In the following chapter, I lay out the historical context of the research setting, Roosevelt City as well as the emergence of Roosevelt City Public Schools. This account is important because it provides a context for understanding the historical struggle of the Black community's desire to access knowledge within a city based on racial domination and subordination. In addition, this telling lends insight into the ways that the transformative teachers in my study worked with institutional constraints to create possibilities to educate their Black students located in inner urban Roosevelt.

In order to tell my account, I combed through archival data, newspapers, journal articles and dissertations in an attempt to capture the history, social and political atmosphere of Roosevelt Public schools. While searching for information, I found that there were very few oral histories of Black teachers who worked in Roosevelt. Therefore, I conducted interviews of retired teachers between the ages of 60 and 85 in order to capture their experiences of attending and teaching in Roosevelt

Public schools before and after *Brown v. Board of Education*. These interviews were open-ended, I did not have a set of fixed questions. Instead, I attempted to find out about the social, political, cultural and economic atmosphere at the time they attended and taught school in Roosevelt. Topics such as teaching philosophy, experiences with racism, the Black public school system and resources were explored throughout each conversation. I close the next chapter with Jones, Cooper and St. John<sup>7</sup> as they continue to experience and negotiate the institutional constraints that are part of the social fabric in Roosevelt City Public Schools.

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<sup>7</sup> I chose not to focus on Jefferson because he taught in a private school.

## Chapter 4

### **Inequality and Black teachers pursuit to forge pathways to access to Knowledge: A Chronicle of Roosevelt City Public Schools**

#### *Background*

In 2004, exactly 50 years after the monumental decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, Roosevelt City Public Schools still remain “separate” and “unequal.” In fact many researchers comment on the *Brown* decision and its “unfinished agenda” in many U.S. Schools (Bell, 2003; Cox & Matthews, 2004). Today, institutionally sanctioned segregation is an unspoken norm as opposed to a written policy (i.e. *Plessy v. Ferguson*). Although there exists a small, but stable, Black middle-class as well as a growing Latino population, Black teachers and students located in inner urban sections of Roosevelt City, still experience ongoing, systematic inequalities in a society built and organized around race and class. In Roosevelt City Public Schools, the status of being “White” comes with a set of privileges, benefits and assumptions. In other words, institutionally, Whites are privileged. In turn, members of the White community developed unspoken expectations about the way things should be (Harris, 1995). For example, following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, historically White schools located in Roosevelt City maintained resource rich environments. Understanding this historical dichotomy of White domination and Black subordination not only sheds light on the inequitable conditions between Blacks and Whites in Roosevelt City, but also helps us to better understand Black teachers’ fight for access to knowledge, both historically and today.

For Black teachers, accessing knowledge includes more than textbooks, smaller class sizes, higher paid and more experienced teachers, better facilities and extensive course offerings. In today's technological society, access to knowledge comes in digitized forms such as access to and meaningful uses of the Internet and computer-related technologies. This reality disproportionately affects certain members of the Black community living in inner urban communities, especially, students who do not have access in their homes and neighborhoods (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000). As society becomes increasingly paperless with more on-line transactions, access to digitized knowledge could have consequences on the educational attainment and occupational knowledge needed for Black students to compete in today's society.

It is within this racialized context that four transformative Black teachers, Kathy Jones, Kofi Jefferson, Christina Cooper and Michael St. John strived to overcome this digitized barrier of access to knowledge for inner-urban Black students in the spirit of Black teachers in the past that fought for education in spite of ongoing barriers to access to knowledge. For these four transformative Black teachers, teaching using technology included more than adding a computer or two to their classroom. It required more than attending a professional development workshop. For these Black teachers who used technology, a significant challenge became overcoming barriers to access to resources.

In order to understand the current institutional challenges faced by Black teachers in this urban context who integrate the use of technology into their teaching practice, I will chronicle milestones in educational policy that affected Black teachers

working in segregated and all Black schools in Roosevelt City Public School. As mentioned in the previous chapter, I conducted oral histories, sifted through newspapers, archival records, census data, and, at times, meeting notes in an attempt to uncover the stories of Black teachers and the ways they strived to create spaces for their students to learn in spite of adverse social, political and economic conditions. Additionally, I analyzed policy and racialized structures, such as the educational site (macro-level) and the ongoing responses and resistance of Black Teachers (micro-level).

In what follows, I illustrate how in Roosevelt City, “Whiteness” has historically become a commodity in a society structured on racial caste, as I explained in Chapter 2. In Roosevelt City Public School, assumptions, privileges and benefits that accompany the status of being “White” became invaluable assets that members of the White community sought to protect through policy as well as hegemonic racialized practices. Later, Whites came to expect and rely on these benefits even when the laws were overturned. For example, students located in historically White areas of Roosevelt city attended schools with more advanced placement course offerings, more in-school and after-school activities and more student-centered curriculum. In this chapter, I will highlight how educational law and policy served the interest of Whites to the exclusion, in many cases, of members of the Black community attending and working in Roosevelt Public School System.

In chronicling the legacy of Black teachers’ attempts to access knowledge within the context of institutionalized racism, it is my hope to provide an understanding of the environment within which these four transformative Black

teachers in this study worked. They attempted to transform the teaching and learning experiences of their Black students using computers and related technologies in personally and culturally-relevant ways in spite of adverse conditions.

### *The Development of Roosevelt City Public Schools*

Roosevelt City has a rich and complex history. While the city is unique in many ways, its history mirrors that of many large U.S. urban cities in its legacy of institutional racism and segregation. Aesthetically, while blessed with attractive residential areas, Roosevelt City is beset with segregated slums that serve as a constant reminder of the gap that exists between racial groups. The racial disparities have particular consequences for poor students and families living in segregated areas of Roosevelt city.

In order to comprehend the experiences of Black teachers working in Roosevelt Public schools, one must understand that the schools reflect the segregation patterns and atmosphere of its city. The city, as well as the public school system, developed in several complicated streams. However, I will focus on two: the “Black” and the “White.” Towards the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, parts of the stream would mix: a select few Blacks would attend school with advantaged whites. However, for the most part these two streams never converged. In spite of this inequitable system, Black teachers working in the inner urban sections of Roosevelt City Public Schools continued to nurture a space where their Black students would become educated.

As I lay out this historical backdrop, I will concentrate on the development of the “Black” stream. Through this approach, I hope to privilege the Black teachers’ voice and demonstrate how Black teachers created spaces for their students to learn in the midst of ongoing segregation and lack of access to knowledge. When relevant, I will highlight features and characteristics of the historical “White” stream.

#### 1800-1900: Two Streams, Separate and Unequal

People of African descent living in America have always valued education for their children, in spite of the variety of explicit and implicit tactics used by the dominant culture to deny them education (Anderson, 1988; Shujaa, 1994; Siddle-Walker, 1996). For instance, during slavery African Americans who learned to read and write would be severely punished and, on occasion, killed. After slavery, when people of African descent built their own educational institutions in an attempt to self-educate, Whites continued to undermine their educational process by going to great lengths to present ongoing obstacles and challenges. Despite these adversities, members of the Black community have both resisted and rejected these hegemonic practices of the dominant culture, bravely striving to self-educate, while facing persistent and profound barriers to educational opportunity. Anderson (1988) in his text, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, discussed in great detail how newly freed Africans used the Freedman’s Bureau as an innovation to attain the first universal schooling system. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, self-education and self-reliance especially held true for the Black community and for Black teachers located in Roosevelt City Public Schools.

To begin understanding the Roosevelt City Public School System context requires an understanding of the districting patterns throughout the 1800's and the 1900's. During the 1800's, large numbers of freed and enslaved Blacks made Roosevelt City their home. They moved to the north for 'a better life.' 'A better life' meant better jobs, better schools and a less racist environment (Finkelman, 2004). By 1865, the Black population increased from 50,000 to 125,000. With new and enforced civil rights laws during this time, Roosevelt City was referred to as a golden age for Blacks. Roosevelt City quickly became a bastion for impressive levels of Black wealth, giving rise to its own cultural renaissance. Native luminaries in the disciplines of writing, dancing, singing, and music left indelible marks not only on Roosevelt City, but also had national impact (Green, 1976).

Not only did the Black community prosper in the arenas of politics and arts, but also in the area of education. Although there is little known about Black schooling in the 1800's, there is evidence that in 1807, three Black men, recently freed from enslavement, risked their lives to establish the first Black school. George Bell, Moses Liverpool and Nicholas Franklin, "who knew not a letter of the alphabet" organized Roosevelt's first school for Black children close to the Roosevelt Waterfront (Fitzpatrick & Goodwin, 1999; Roosevelt Historical Society, 1969). In order to strategically quell White opposition, Bell placed an advertisement in the newspaper stating that "no writings are to be done by the teachers for a slave, neither directly or indirectly, to serve the purpose of a slave on any account..." However, this school did serve the Black community and was the first in a long line of

educational institutions developed by and for members of the Black community (Roosevelt Historical Journal, 1969, p. 57).

Towards the turn of the century, the number of Black school teachers was on the rise. Statistical data revealed that between 1890-1891, Roosevelt City Public Schools employed 265 Black teachers. Among those, 40 were males and 225 were females (Hutchinson, 1982).

#### 1900-1953: The Development of the Streams

By emancipation in 1865, two “unofficial” separate schooling systems co-existed in Roosevelt, one Black, the other White (Baritz, 1975). In 1901, the Appropriation Act for Roosevelt City Public Schools, set up a Board of Education to have control over all of the public schools in Roosevelt with one superintendent and two assistant superintendents. One of the superintendents would assume leadership over the Black schooling system. This act made official the distinction between the White and the Black schooling systems. Additionally, this act legally sanctioned a separate race-based dual schooling system that laid the groundwork for unequal resources, funding and expectations.

Initially, students attending “colored” schools were taught by White instructors. By 1904, the last White teacher was replaced by a Black teacher (West, 1952) making the Black school system referred to as Division II officially “all Black.” Although, an all-Black schooling system existed, members of the Black community, during this time, were at liberty to live throughout Roosevelt city.

In 1913, Black residential dispersion in Roosevelt City came to a halt (Manning, 1998). The political leader at that time enacted his vision of race relations in Roosevelt which, over the next 20 years, led to the sharp erosion of the Black middle class and the wearing away of the Black community's social, political and economic rights. In addition, many agencies became segregated. As a result, Blacks living in Roosevelt were blatantly restricted to racially confined neighborhoods in the inner-city; White residents spread to the outer zones of the city and to the suburbs, while Black residents piled up. Census data on population characteristics between 1930 and 1940 show the contrast (See Table 4):

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**Table 4.1: Population Characteristics: Roosevelt City, 1947**

	"Negro" Increase	White Increase
Inner Zones	38,136	21,873
Outer Zones	17,062	99,141
Suburbs	5,836	104,699
Metropolitan	61,034	225,713

Taken from the Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics, July 1947

The majority of African Americans during this time lived within a 2 1/4 mile radius of the business district. "Negroes" were distinctively defined as those with identifiable African ancestry, phenotypical features or 'known socially as colored' even if they could 'pass' as white (Landis, 1948). In this case, laws and unwritten policies functioned to design a system of discrimination based on biologically

determined characteristics. “Whiteness” as a racialized privilege was legitimated and embraced through this unwritten doctrine (Harris, 1995).

The competition for scarce housing in Roosevelt city was exacerbated by the influx of White workers. Members of the Black community, unable to move to the suburbs, began to cluster into pockets in compressed, less desirable inner-urban zones (Manning, 1998). In the 1940’s, Manning, a historian, noted:

The government promoted passive segregation policies that affirmed this tenuous social geography. These include restrictive covenants for preventing property transfer to specified groups, denying construction permits, and/or financing to African American housing developments outside the designated black zones, condemning Black-owned residential property in the ‘public interest’ (highways, public buildings, parks, white housing), permitting suburban communities to reject federal funds for public housing, and administering federal mortgage loan [FHA, VA] programs so that Blacks would not be able to purchase homes in the suburbs (Manning, 1988, pg. 335).

In spite of these laws, the Black community thrived and flourished. Insulated, Black people created a self-sufficient society in Roosevelt where Black-owned businesses, newspapers, churches, educational and civic institutions prospered. Oral narratives of members of the Black community during this time revealed that Roosevelt City attracted famous entertainers from around the nation. As Howard Lincoln, 88, a resident and former student of Roosevelt City recalled, “The Roosevelt theatres attracted big black stars like Duke Ellington, Nat Cole, Count Basie. Even white folks would come from the suburbs to see these acts” (personal communication, April 10, 2004).

There was also a sense of community among Blacks during this time. Elizabeth Sampson recollected her experiences as a child growing up in Roosevelt. “There was a coffee shop. We had house parties. There were positive role models.

When we walked down Allen Street (a main thoroughfare in the Black community), there was a sense of confidence...we would feel good about ourselves. During this time, you did not have to lock your door in those days' (personal communication, April 18, 2004). Sampson spoke of the close social relationships developed within the Black community when segregation was imposed. Many members of the Black community did not consider this a concern; in fact there was a sense of self-reliance. The Black community thrived as they developed and maintained strong social networks.

Although the social relations within the Black community flourished, the dual schooling system remained intact, separate and unequal in Roosevelt City. Schools for Black students were inferior to those facilities of whites. Most of the Black schools were built prior to World War I. A third of the buildings were built before the Spanish American War. Playgrounds, gymnasiums, athletic fields, auditoriums, classrooms, desks, maps, blackboards, shop fixtures were all inferior (Landis, 1948). Thus, the relative economic, political and social advantages dispensed to the White community under systematic White supremacy in Roosevelt were reinforced through patterns of segregation and oppression.

In spite of the disparities within this dual "stream," the Black community fought to establish and maintain the only high school for "coloreds" during this period, Mitchell Preparatory High School. Mitchell Preparatory School, a premier educational institution, was the first and only colored high school in Roosevelt. Mitchell Preparatory, renowned nationally for its focus on high academic

achievement and outstanding alumni, emerged during this period as a “model for Black education.”

During a conversation with a former student, teacher and administrator in Roosevelt City, Julius West, 81, reflected on his relationships with Black teachers while a student at Mitchell Preparatory School:

The Black teachers at Mitchell Prep High School were highly respected. They inspired us... I lived up to my potential. My teacher was interested in me as a person...they expected us to learn and to make a difference in our community (personal communication, April 10, 2004).

As evidenced by the interview, West viewed his teachers as strong role models. He also recollected their dedication to their Black students. West raised an important point. Learning was not only for knowledge sake, the end goal of education was to make a difference in the Black community.

Many Black teachers who came to Mitchell Preparatory were highly educated. These Black instructors held Ph.D.'s and Masters and had attended schools such as Oberlin College, Harvard University and Minor Normal Teaching College. As West remembered, “they brought their skills back to the school.”

West continued to explain, during one of our conversations, why Black teachers at this time were so educated. In this day, he shared, if you were Black and living in Roosevelt you could only be a messenger or clerk for the government, or you could become a teacher. Mitchell Preparatory School was a premier institution; therefore it attracted highly qualified teachers. Black teachers came from all over the country to work at Mitchell Preparatory for both social and financial reasons. Roosevelt City was a magnet for Black teachers because it was a premier city ripe with social opportunities. Therefore, after attending prestigious universities, they

purposely chose to teach in Roosevelt City Public Schools, at the most respected Black high school in the country.

Not only were the teachers highly educated, but also many of these Black teachers sought to make a difference in the Black community. During a conversation, Sally Thomas, a 1936 graduate of Mitchell Preparatory School remembered,

Most of the teachers I had held Masters and Ph.D.'s. Black teachers taught Greek and Latin, in addition the basic skills of reading and writing. As part of the overarching philosophy of the school, teachers and administrators alike believed that the purpose of education was to prepare students for service to the Black race. S. Thomas (personal communication, March 22, 2004)

As Thomas recollected, Black teachers pushed their students to attend the large, endowed Northwestern Universities where they could become doctors and lawyers and utilize their talents within the Black community. Southern White colleges would not accept Black students and most historically Black schools were not accredited. There was little hope for Black students, at this time, entering the professions of law or medicine, otherwise. Therefore, Black teachers working at Mitchell Preparatory taught with the expectation that their Black students would matriculate through a mainstream institution and return to the Black community for service. A good number of Black students graduating from Mitchell Preparatory High School during the late 1800's attended Harvard, Yale, Brown, Amherst, Dartmouth and Radcliffe (Hutchinson, 1981). Mitchell Preparatory School remained a premier institution throughout the 1900's.

Although, many students recalled positive memories of their Black teachers and of their educational experiences in Roosevelt City Public Schools, there were ongoing institutionalized challenges. For example, overcrowding in the Black school

system remained a critical issue in spite of the rise in numbers in the Black teaching force. In 1930, 34 percent (1062) of Roosevelt teachers were Black. By 1948, the number of Black teachers employed by Roosevelt City Public Schools rose to 41 percent (1,384) (Hutchinson, 1981). In spite of the rise in Black teachers, a report conducted by the National Negro Congress in 1941 found that on average there were 40 students per teacher in the Black schooling system as opposed to the Board of Education standard of 36 students per teacher. The report further found severe overcrowding in the elementary, middle and high schools located within the Black schooling system. The following chart highlights the number of classes with overcrowding within the elementary schools.

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**Table 4.2: Black Elementary Schooling System: Reports of Overcrowding, 1941**

Classes	Number of Students
213	41 or more pupils
61	46 or more pupils
16	51 or more pupils
2	56 or more pupils

Data Taken from Black Elementary Schooling System: Reports of Overcrowding Roosevelt City Public Schools' failure to address the overcrowding in classes, according to a critique by the Roosevelt Council, National Negro Congress, "represented more than an effort to economize, it reflected deliberate racial discrimination" (National Negro Congress, p. 4). As this study found, there was little

attempt to respond to this inequity by the Roosevelt Board of Education (Roosevelt Council, 1941). Between the years of 1946-1947 White schools were only three quarters filled (Landis, 1948).

In 1947, an article written in a local newspaper entitled, *School Produces Good Citizens in Roosevelt's Most Neglected Area*, captures other problematic conditions rife in the Black school system. Old, dilapidated buildings and limited resources, in addition to overcrowding, challenged many Black teachers and administrators. In the following excerpt the staff writer for this article describes her thoughts about the deplorable conditions at Cummings Elementary School, a school located in the Black schooling system,

Constructed in 1890 as a high school, the building was later condemned as unfit for use and abandoned. Built originally for 200 students, its capacity is now 673, the enrollment is 734. The extra children sit on cafeteria stools without backs, on the window sills or on the floor.

The academic work is no less handicapped by overcrowded classrooms with bad lighting. There is no library...the hole in the wall that contains what few books the library boasts would deter anyone from the pursuit of knowledge. As none of these old schools has a playground, the children play either in the street, a main artery, and fire land. Diagonally across from the school, there is a large enclosed playground for white children. Nobody uses it, as only a handful of white families live in the apartment nearby.

In spite of the physical barriers and other dire conditions, the reporter found that highly-educated Black teachers and administrators were committed to providing for and educating their Black students. The staff writer quoted the school principal as saying of most importance to her was the "deep and humane compassion which she had for her race, especially for the children who suffer most acutely from the white

man's conscious and unconscious repression of that race." As evidenced by the quote, the principal's impetus seemed to be grounded in the desire to create a safe space for her students most deeply affected by the explicit and institutional racism afflicting her students.

Teachers, along with the principal, worked above and beyond the call of duty to ensure a safe, productive and holistic environment for their Black students. In the article, the staff writer spoke to the teachers' beliefs about community involvement and meeting the needs of the whole child. She shared,

When the children leave school at 5:30, the teachers' hardest work begins. They have meetings with the parents of problem children either at the school or at their home. The P.T.A. with a membership of 2000 includes not only parents by cousins, aunts and uncles who enjoy the lectures by leading experts in nutrition and health and the sociables at which the lectures are discussed.

In addition to a focus on the health and community outreach, the reporter also found that teachers fostered an environment where their students developed a spiritual foundation.

We found it advisable to have devotional services every Monday morning, with the Bible readings and talks by a priest or clergyman, because it gives all the children a chance to quiet down.

Finally, teachers believed it was their responsibility to attend to their students' basic needs. The staff writer found that these Black teachers would sacrifice their own well being in order to provide food and clothing to their students,

[Teachers] paid for breakfast for the children who come to school hungry. They are not only able by warm-hearted people. Often they go without new

shoes and dresses to clothe the pupils, especially when some poor youngster would have to stay away from graduation.

This article provides a striking example of how Black teachers worked within the physical and social confines of this Roosevelt elementary school located in the segregated Black system. This article also demonstrates how these teachers relied on principles of communal self-help to create a space where their students could receive physical, spiritual and intellectual nourishment.

Although many Black teachers continued to educate their Black students within the inequitable conditions of the all-Black segregated schools, lack of access to knowledge and overcrowded, dilapidated schools, became a growing concern for members of the Black community located in segregated areas. Throughout this time, parents and community members fought incessantly for access to equal educational resources, much of the time to no avail (Baritz, 1975).

In 1950, a frustrated barber, Robert Wilson, became tired of his son attending the Black school across town which was described as “forty eight years old, dingy, ill-equipped and located across the street not from the velvet green of a golf course but from The Lucky Pawnbroker Exchange. Its science laboratory consisted of one Bunsen burner and a goldfish (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2000, pg. 76).” One day, he walked his son, along with ten other Black children, to the newly built White school, Ward Junior High,<sup>8</sup> in their neighborhood and demanded admittance: The following passage illustrates how he vehemently fought against the racialized

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<sup>8</sup> Please note that this is one of the schools in this study.

practices of Roosevelt Public school by demanding access to resources for their children.

On September 11, 1950 Wilson led a group of eleven African American children to the city's new high school for white students. The school, named for Ward, was a large modern building, boasting spacious classrooms and multiple basketball courts. When the group reached the high school, Robert Wilson requested admittance for the African American students that had accompanied him to see Ward High School. It seemed clear that the building could accommodate a higher enrollment. His request was denied, ensuring the African American students a continued unequal educational experience (Kansas State Historical Society, 2003, p.4).

Denied solely on the basis of racial identity, Wilson filed a petition, which, four years later, resulted in a lawsuit that would land in the Supreme Court alongside *Brown v. Board of Education*. This decision, which overturned segregation in Roosevelt Public School, led to extensive White flight to the suburbs, leaving in its wake, not legal segregation, but socially and culturally sanctioned segregated housing patterns and schools (Baritz, 1975). Like many other urban schools, Black students within Roosevelt Public Schools continued to suffer from chronic problems such as attending dilapidated schools, overcrowding, and inadequate resources. The push to integrate only served to aggravate the already inequitable social and economic conditions pervasive in Roosevelt Public schools for many Black residents.

#### 1955-1970: Streams briefly intersect

Much changed after the *Brown v. Board Decision* of 1954. Schools that were all White, integrated, and shortly thereafter, became all-Black. For example, an article in the Roosevelt Chronicle demonstrated the changing demographics at Central High School. The article states:

Central continued to lose Whites at a dizzying pace. In 1954, 404 Blacks and 562 Whites attended Central. Four years later 1,375 Blacks and 114 Whites did, according to a school report. By 1964, there were nine white students. Integration at Central was dead (Wee, 2004).

Jenee Sampson recalled vast changes in the educational system as well as in the schooling process for Black youth attending Roosevelt Schools. She shared that before the *Brown Decision*, she had wonderful Black teachers as role models and several all-Black social outlets such as the movies, parks and restaurants. She expressed, “family and teachers shielded us from the hurt and isolation that would come with racism. It did not affect the way I felt about myself. Our intelligence was affirmed. There were certain places that we could go and certain places that we could not go but that did not bother us because we had everything that we needed in our own society. After the decision, it seems as though society changed, schools changed and yet, things remained racially segregated” (personal communication, April 18, 2004).

Racial segregation and lack of access to knowledge post-*Brown* not only occurred between schools, it also happened within schools. In 1957, Kevin Jenson,<sup>9</sup> became Superintendent of Roosevelt City Public Schools and proposed “official academic tracking” as a way to solve the “differences in educational attainment among the children in Roosevelt City Public Schools” (Baritz, 1975, p. 32). With “academic tracking,” segregation became re-conceptualized. As opposed to separating students of different races between schools, students of different races were separated within schools. In other words, the “academic” tracking system

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<sup>9</sup> Jenson gave Ms. Cooper her first job in Roosevelt School District

segregated Black and White students within the same buildings based on four educational tracks, ranging from basic to honors.

At first, this seemed to be a good idea for all of the stakeholders who believed that something should be done to alleviate the racial disparity in achievement within schools. However, the desire to counter the racial disparity had more to do with the notorious reputation Roosevelt was developing nationally and internationally due to racism and low academic achievement, than a growing concern for the education of Black children (Diner, 1982). This reality supports Bell's (1995) interest-convergence theory, which argues that "the interests of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it serves the interests of whites" (p. 22). Also, during this time, Roosevelt City experienced a new wave of Southern Blacks who migrated to Roosevelt due to job opportunity and ample housing. The number of Blacks increased from approximately 285,000 to 410,000 (Hutchinson, 1977). Simultaneously, the number of Whites living in Roosevelt fell from approximately 518,000 to 352,000, thus making Roosevelt the prototype "chocolate city" with "vanilla suburbs" characteristic of U.S. cities at this time.

By 1966, the total number of teachers working in Roosevelt City Public Schools rose to 6,325. Among those, 4,967 were Negro and 1,378 were White (Pascal, 1967). Although there was a rise in Black teachers after the *Brown Decision of 1954*, the disparities in access to educational resources and quality education between Blacks and Whites, continued to be a persistent problem within Roosevelt since the majority of Black students were located in the lower academic tracks.

Shortly after its implementation, the Roosevelt public school tracking system

met with opposition from the Black community. Black community members sued the superintendent of schools in 1967. The courts found that “ability grouping as presently practiced in Roosevelt City is a denial of equal opportunity to the poor and a majority of Negroes attending schools, a denial that contravenes not only guarantees of the Fifth Amendment but also the fundamental premise of tracking itself.” The court ordered that the tracking system be terminated (Hurlbut, 1981). This court case also provided an opportunity for members of the Black community to argue against the legality of unequal school funding and resources. They argued that unequal spending led to unequal educational opportunity. The court responded favorably to the Black community’s concerns and found that: Black students received considerably less funding than white students; Black schools were generally overcrowded; reading scores for Black children fell increasingly behind the national norm; aptitude tests were culturally biased; Black students were assigned to tracks for reasons other than ability, testing procedures were irrelevant and invalid, curriculum in the lower tracks led to “blue color” jobs; and, honor tracks were available at certain schools (Sampson, 1967). To remedy the situation, Judge Sampson ordered that Roosevelt Public Schools must provide transportation for children attending overcrowded schools, integrate faculty and eradicate all racial and economic discrimination.

This court order, in Roosevelt, still remains a dream deferred. “Unofficial” academic tracking is still a predominate practice in Roosevelt Public Schools. In addition, access to knowledge is still a major concern for the Black community.

In 1968, with the Fair Housing Act, many middle class Blacks living in Roosevelt left their urban communities and moved to the suburbs. They left behind a city firmly rooted in segregation and a Black school system grossly unequal in comparison to the historically “White schools.” Although many Black teachers still held high expectations for their students and attempted to instill in them a belief in themselves, many Black students still attended antiquated, overcrowded schools where irrelevant curriculum prevailed (Baritz, 1975).

#### The Black Stream in 2004: A Continued Legacy of Defacto Apartheid

In 2004, Roosevelt City maintains predominantly White affluent and predominately Black impoverished enclaves. Even as a growing high-wealth city, where rising property value, gentrification and an influx of middle-class Whites have transformed the economic and social character of Roosevelt City, large pockets of poverty still remain. Neighborhoods in Roosevelt City illustrate that vast racial and class differences still exist for poor Black students. Where students from King Middle School, Clinton Diagnostic Center and Western High (schools in this study) are located, liquor stores, check cashing facilities, churches and pawn shops disproportionately litter the neighborhoods as compared to neighborhoods on the west side, reflecting race and class segregation (see Appendix A).

Furthermore, the neighborhoods are unsafe. In fact, one beautiful warm summer day, while driving home from an interview at Western, I noticed a bloodied young, Black man walking down the street with another young man who was gently encouraging him to hurry up. As I looked closer, the young man had clearly been shot in the back. As I pulled over to ask if they needed any assistance, I quickly

reminded myself that this situation may not have reached closure and I was right in the middle of it—and the young men must have thought the same because they quickly rushed me away. I immediately recalled just weeks prior a high school senior at a nearby high school was shot in the building as he was attending classes. I left thinking, despite the residential area with its stunning greenery and settled homes, 2 miles south of the historic downtown area, danger looms. This experience demonstrates that students living in these neighborhoods cannot take everyday occurrences like walking to or attending school for granted. These living conditions, in many ways, reflect the quality of life for many Blacks living in the inner-urban environment of Roosevelt City.<sup>10</sup> Reports reveal that violent crime in Roosevelt city, especially among juveniles, have prompted widespread fear among many of its residents. In July and August of 2003, Roosevelt police reported making 503 arrests for violent crimes such as murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault (Butts, 2003). These statistics remind residents that in spite of the occasional police presence, safety is not a guarantee.

Boundaries demarcated across race and class lines still serve as boundaries to undermine access to opportunity, not only in the neighborhoods, but also in the

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<sup>10</sup> In general, mass media and society as a whole equates crime with poor Blacks (Delgado, 1995). Commonplace are representations in the news that purport that Blacks make up 12.1 percent of the nation's population but commit most of the murders and are over-represented among homicide victims. In addition reports indicate that Blacks are six times more likely to be murder and seven times more likely to be killed (Roosevelt Daily News, 2003). Although crime, poverty and suffering are major issues in inner-urban environments, members of the Black community tend to be demonized by mass media and socially constructed as criminals and as unsafe to be around (Delgado, 1995). In reality, white collar crime such as embezzlement, bribery, price-checking and insider trading tend to be committed by Whites. Furthermore, violent crimes such as medical misconduct, the marketing of lethally dangerous products, toxic dumping, and declaration and participation in war tend not to be thought of as crimes although they result in the deaths of millions. For more information on the racialized social construction of crime see Delgado, Rodrigo Chronicles (8).

schools for poor Black students. Although resource allocation from Roosevelt Public School central offices is equal, two schools located in the same district of Roosevelt still offer dramatically different educational opportunities. For poorer Blacks attending school in inner-urban parts of the school district, location determines access to certain discourses impacting students well after high school. In what follows, I will briefly demonstrate how funding and curriculum perpetuate the long legacy of inequality in services offered for Black students attending Roosevelt City Public Schools. Then, I will explain how resources, including technological resources are disseminated in Roosevelt City Public Schools. I will close by illuminating how each transformative Black teacher participating in this study met the challenge of accessing technological resources.

*The Current Context: Two Streams, Separate and Unequal*

Like many urban schools in the U.S., high turn-over rate among the leadership in the central administration remains a critical issue. Over the past 20 years, Roosevelt has had seven superintendents about one every 2.9 years (GSA, 2004). With each change in leadership, came a new vision, new policies and a new set of faces.

Recognizing the immense inequalities that exist between schools, in 1999, Roosevelt City enacted a policy that vastly altered the ways funds would be disseminated to each school. Instead of parceling out money to individual schools, Roosevelt began using a per-pupil weighted formula. In essence, state and federal funding would be allocated to each school based on the weighted average assigned to each student. In 2003, each student received \$4,115.21. However, depending on the academic level, the formula would be weighted; for example early elementary is

given top priority, a weight of 1.19% or \$4,897. Roosevelt high school students received a little over 1%, \$4,115. Special education students, second language learners and free and reduced lunch recipients received considerably more funding per pupil.<sup>11</sup> According to the director of academic services, central administrators enacted this policy for two reasons: first, schools retained more local control and second, funding per school became more transparent and more equitable (personal communication, February, 19, 2004). This funding provided support for all expenditures from staff salary and school curriculum to minor facility repairs and toilet paper. Roosevelt Public Schools did allocate additional funding for computer technology (more details below). Any supplementary funding, however, would need to be initiated by schools in the form of fund raising efforts, corporate or community donations or parental support. In spite of this systematic change in 1999, race and location in Roosevelt Public schools still dictate access to resources and in turn, access to knowledge. In the following pages, I will demonstrate how educational inequity is sustained through racial privilege and location by looking at curriculum and resources in two schools located in different areas in Roosevelt Public school system.

### Current Differences within the Stream

*Curriculum.* An examination of Roosevelt City Public Schools' curriculum shows how inequity continues to play itself out across racial and class lines. In this case,

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<sup>11</sup> Although students who are the recipients of free and reduced lunch receive considerably more funding, Roosevelt City Public Schools dictates how money is spent regardless of level of enrollment in public schools. In schools located in inner-urban environments where enrollment tends to be low, administrators sacrifice music and art education in addition to resources such as computer technology in order to meet Roosevelt City Public School mandates. This policy may contribute to the lack of resources still evident in inner-urban Roosevelt City Public Schools.

curriculum operates on multiple levels; it is not only the information included or excluded in a textbook, but it also includes the structure of classes and the processes by which students are placed in classrooms (Yosso, 2002; Oakes, 1985). With regard to textbooks, the central administration in Roosevelt Public schools elects a committee of teachers to adopt one textbook for each grade level and for each of the disciplines. This textbook is mandated for all schools to use, unless schools undergo an extensive process to request a different textbook. If schools opt to do so, they must utilize an external budget to cover the cost.

In a recent study, the Council of Great City Schools (CGS), a non-profit evaluation board examined Roosevelt City curriculum and found that the majority of Roosevelt Public Schools used antiquated editions of a reading series without all of the supplemental materials that came with the program (CGS, 2004). I asked a Roosevelt City Public School administrator, Jerla King, about the use of other textbooks such as *Everyday Math*, a progressive, student-centered math textbook that focuses on math concepts. King responded that a few Roosevelt City Public Schools do use this math programs, however, it was mostly used in the whiter, more affluent areas of the city. She further explained that those schools could afford the additional funding to buy the books and qualified teachers to deliver the content, but most Roosevelt City schools do not have the funds or the teachers. From this conversation, I gathered that the parent associations in these schools played enormous roles in the way that resources were attained in certain schools. Parent associations in schools located in historically White areas donated their money, time and resources in order

to undergo the extensive process of adopting the more interactive, project oriented curriculum and textbook replete with necessary supplemental material.

Curriculum can also be thought about as the way knowledge is organized. For, example, course offerings represent curriculum. In Roosevelt City Public Schools, course offerings provide insight into the vastly different experiences for Black students located in certain sections of the city, primarily the southern and eastern sections. In Roosevelt, advanced placement classes operate entirely on an external budget (i.e. parent associations, donations) (CGS, 2004). Thus, schools with more outside funding are able to implement a more exhaustive advanced placement program. This practice, in turn, perpetuates the dual and unequal schooling system. Within Roosevelt, schools located in historically white and affluent areas offer more extensive Advanced Placement programs.

For example, Western high school, a historically Black segregated school located in the eastern section of the district offers five Advanced Placement classes (see appendix B). Coolidge High School, a historically white, high school, which currently serves a racially diverse, yet middle class, school population offers nineteen advanced placement classes, including multiple foreign language classes. In addition, during school year 2002-2003, Western offered five extra-curricular activities as compared to Coolidge which offered forty-four during and after school activities. Coolidge, in offering significantly more after school activities and clubs, provides for its middle class Black students and White students exposure to a plethora of skills including debating, the National Honors society, and future business leaders of America. These extra-curricular activities can be thought of as additional knowledge

since it leads to the accumulation of technical skills and knowledge for the work force. These skills could, perhaps, aid these students in being admitted to and graduating from colleges and universities.

In certain schools, we see evidence that “Whiteness” as a racialized privilege is still valued in Roosevelt; White parents receive institutional support that allows them to wield power. To illustrate, one Black Roosevelt City parent living in a historically under-resourced part of Roosevelt City, but whose children attended a school located in a historically privileged area, stated that since many of these parents are connected to different social networks than Black parents, they can informally demand more qualified administration and more resources. Furthermore, whatever, Roosevelt City Public Schools is unable to provide, White parents are able to tap into informal social networks in order to provide for the students in the school via active alumni, large endowments, or hands-on parental support (T. Daniel, personal communication, March 15, 2004). As Wells and Serna (1996) found in their study of tracking in racially mixed schools, “as long as elite parents press the schools to perpetuate their status through intergenerational transmission of privilege that is based more on cultural capital than ‘merit’ educators will be forced to choose between equity based reform and the flight of elite parents from the public school system” (p. 116). As these educational theorists remind us, although some Black students benefit from these extra resources when located in integrated settings, the perpetuation of institutionalized tracking does more to maintain race and class status quo in Roosevelt Public Schools.

Paying close attention to the historical context of segregation within Roosevelt City illuminates the contradiction in ideals such as “meritocracy” and the “American Dream.” The “American Dream” is based on the premise that equality of opportunity exists for all Americans to pursue money, property and social resources. In other words, that as long as there is opportunity, it is accessible to all; and, that people who do succeed are responsible for their success (Weber, 2002). Thus, the “American Dream” promotes notions that people become wealthy as a result of a natural sorting process. However, I have highlighted, using Roosevelt City Public Schools, as a case example, that constructs of race and class serve as a way of unraveling the complex experiences of members of the Black community’s pursuit for a quality education. Schools in Roosevelt City served as a means to structure inequalities predicated on white domination and Black subordination and, in some ways, restricted the life chances of many Black children.

Within this dichotomy, Black teachers believed in the power of education as a liberating vehicle (Anderson, 1988). As a form of social capital, they provided guidance for their Black students and facilitated their transitions through school. They maintained their own social networks and worked hard to provide in their students the necessary skills and knowledge so that their students could negotiate with the dominant culture.

With the onset of the technological age, educating Black students located in inner-urban areas with the necessary skills can be particularly challenging; however, the transformative Black teachers participating in this study, made this a reality. Education and the use of computer technology were marked by racial uplift,

culturally connectedness and purposeful instruction. Given the aforementioned historical inequities and barriers to access to knowledge for many Black students attending Roosevelt City Public Schools, various questions needed to be asked such as: what were the dispositions of transformative Black teachers who used computer technology in urban classrooms? What would it mean for Black students to engage in computer technology in schools? What would teachers need to know to be able to teach students using computer technology? Using, ngona, teacher narratives of life experiences and classroom practices in the next four chapters, I will address these questions. I will begin by examining resource allocation as it relates to computer technology in Roosevelt City. More specifically, I will discuss the computer technology resources and challenges faced by the four teachers participating in this study.

#### Resource allocation: Access to Computer Technology

John Brown, the Director of Educational Technology in Roosevelt City Public Schools shares that he is given 1.2 million dollars annually to disseminate to schools in order to pay for hardware, software, professional development and on-line resources. He continues to add, in frustration, that he receives less than 10% of the budget of surrounding suburbs. To supplement, he has become an astute grant writer, taking full advantage of federal grants and other opportunities to funnel money into schools to enhance their technology program. His top priority is insuring that those schools located in the “neediest areas” receive computer technology resources first.

Over the last three years, Johnson developed a system for disseminating computer technology. Each Roosevelt elementary classroom receives Macintosh computers

and educational software when a teacher completes thirty-six hours of training. Elementary schools receive Apple computers, while high schools receive personal computers. Each of the three public school teachers in this study received the standard three computers;<sup>12</sup> however, access to software and technical maintenance presented challenges for each of these transformative Black teachers in different ways. In the following pages, I will speak to the experiences and responses to technological challenges for each of the transformative teachers participating in this study who work at Roosevelt Public Schools. These stories provide about the context where these teachers work will provide a backdrop for the chapters that follow.

### *A Look Within the Stream*

#### Jones

Jones taught at Western High School, the comparison school in the aforementioned scenario. Of all the transformative teachers, Jones was most challenged by inferior resources and lack of technical support. In fact, she once told me that “you get support one percent of the time of when you need it because you have to wait in line like going to the emergency room on New Year’s Eve. Like everybody is in there and you need to take a number.”

When I first entered Jones’s classrooms, I noticed six Macintosh computers located side by side on two different computer tables. On the back wall, three more computers were lined up. I would come to find out that only three of the computers were operable; and those that did work had minimal memory. Jones, unlike the rest

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<sup>12</sup> Although there are four teachers participating in this study, I am only focusing on the three who work in Roosevelt City Public Schools, Jones, St. John and Cooper. Kofi worked in an African-centered private school.

of the transformative teachers, taught graphic arts. Thus, computer technology was a central component in her course. Jones expressed that, with twenty-five students per class, between eight and nine students would need to share a computer during the course of one class period. Each computer was bought in 1996 and contained antiquated software such as Photo Deluxe and outdated versions of Microsoft Word. Only one computer was connected to the Internet and the room housed only one Hewlard Packard colored printer. In spite of these conditions, Jones received high commendations from the Superintendent, administrators, community leaders, non-profit organizations and the AERA participants based on the kind of digital portraits her students designed. Year after year she received awards from Coca-Cola, Discovery Channel and other corporations. Her students' work was displayed not only throughout the district, but also nationwide.

*"I need help!" Technological Challenges*

In March, midway through an extensive digital project on the Amistad, one of the computers crashed, leaving Jones with two working computers. As a result of the computer crash, 2/3 of her students' work was irretrievable. Jones and I discussed meeting with the principal about possibly attaining one extra computer from an unused lab. Apparently, Brown, Director of Instructional Technology, installed two new computer laboratories that were rarely used by students or faculty. When we approached the principal, Ronny Jefferson, he refused the request to transfer one of the computers to Jones' room, stating that he wanted the computers to be used for computer-based Stanford-9 practice. He told us that he was waiting for the appropriate software to be ordered so that the computer labs could start running. To

my amazement, Jefferson asked Jones to lead the search for mathematics computer software. We left our short meeting with Jones directing the search for computer-based software and serving as a consultant for the mathematics testing committee. The computers in the lab remained untouched for the majority of the year and Jones did not receive an extra computer.

Nevertheless, Jones did not stop the Amistad project. Fortunately, over spring break, Brown sent a SWAT team to replace the antiquated computers. All of the old computers were replaced with newer computers, larger monitors and more memory. Additionally, the SWAT team retrieved her students' work. Throughout the process, Jones remained flexible, hopeful and prayerful that the challenges would work themselves out.

Jones also held herself personally accountable for purchasing much needed materials for her class. She relied on her own strategies to creatively bring money and additional resources into the classroom. She often used personal funds, such as her tax refund check, as well as outside grants to buy paper, supplies, printer ink, etc for the classrooms. Throughout the year, she would enter her students' work in several contests throughout the Roosevelt area. With the money that she was awarded, she would purchase software, ink, and paper. Jones, like other teachers in this study, would scour garage sales looking for old radios so that her students could listen to their favorite hip-hop stations while in class.

### St. John

St. John was self-reliant when it came to attaining and repairing computer technology in his classroom. He taught at Clinton Diagnostic Center, a school for emotionally disturbed students. The school was located in an inner-urban section of Roosevelt City. When it came to computers and related technologies, St. John stated “I don’t look toward the school for anything. However, whenever technical support comes around, if I need any help with my personal stuff, they do help.”

In his classroom, St. John appreciated the money that Roosevelt gave to its students for resources and made it a point to spend his allotment on equipment that could be used for multiple purposes. He took great care of these materials and kept them in good condition for his future students. However, the majority of the resources in his classroom came from yard sales and second-hand stores. St. John deemed it his responsibility to provide computer technology resources for his students. During one of our many conversations he stated, “don’t stop at just what [Roosevelt] is going to give them. Make it personal and move on.” It was not uncommon during the course of a day-long observation, to witness St. John working through his lunch hour or break to fix or reconstruct a broken computer.

Every weekend, St. John ventured to the surrounding suburbs in search of books, equipment, second hand computers and other resources to bring to his classroom. To illustrate he pointed out that “[he] would go to the libraries in Elizabeth County to buy books that are disregarded...Caucasian parents buy books for their kids and read the book a couple of times and then give it to the library. I go there and buy books

for 24 cents and I bring them to the classroom. These kids treat the books like gold because they have never seen them before.”

He also wanted his students to authentically experience the materials in his classrooms. In St. John’s opinion, brand new resources donated to Roosevelt classrooms were under-utilized because some teachers and administrators feel that students may destroy the equipment in the process of using it. St. John was critical of teachers and administrators who displayed this attitude and believed that exposure, even if the item was broken, was most important:

You don’t want them to run around in the classroom, because you are afraid that they will break the microscope. Well I go and I buy an old microscope. I go in the summer when there is a yard sale in [a surrounding suburb]. I go and I bring it here. They break it then I go buy another. It is five or ten dollars. But the fact is that that child has been exposed to that microscope. He has looked at slides. He knows slides. I go to Melvos and I buy an old IBM computer. Bring it in and strip it. That is why I do what I do. I give them a chance to explore. We cut this paper. We mess up we clean it up. That is about it. There is a book out there, if it got torn, I go to [surrounding suburb] and pay a quarter, I buy another one and I bring it back.

St. John also took full advantage of opportunities to solicit donations from local organizations. For example, one afternoon I shared that a friend at a local non-profit mentioned that the organization was giving away computers. The very next day, he made arrangements to leave school and pick up the older computers, some of which needed to be rebuilt. The following week, I entered his classroom to find a complete computer lab set up with four additional computers. I later found out that he arrived to school early, worked through lunchtime and after school to be sure that the lab was up and running for his students.

In addition to the technological resources in his classroom, St. John had access to the school computer lab. He worked closely with the instructional technology teacher, Reed, to design and produce more sophisticated technology projects that require digital cameras, iMovie<sup>13</sup> software and digital videos. I recall first walking into her computer lab. I recorded in my journal this day,

As I entered Reed's classroom, which also served as the computer lab for the school, I could hear Missy Elliot playing in the background. Large windows filled the back wall; colorful bulletin boards boasted student work and gave the room a warm and welcoming atmosphere. This large room, located near the front office, accommodated five kidney-shaped tables, an office space for Morgan, and an unused Coke and snack machine. Apparently the room served as the faculty lounge the year before and as of yet the administration had not removed much of the equipment to the dismay and disgust of Lisa. In addition, the room had 15 wireless Mac laptops, a plethora of computer software "begged, bought or "stolen" and a small HP deskjet printer. In the background, I could hear the faint cry of a child screaming and the noises of afternoon dismissal.

As a result of the resourcefulness, self-reliance and perseverance of both St. John and Reed, St. John's black male students, who were labeled emotionally disturbed, were able to design, create and produce their own personal movies based on the thematic unit, "Things that move."

### Cooper

Cooper worked at Ward Middle School, a highly contested site for the battle for equality during the 1954 *Brown Decision*. Today, Ward Middle School is 100% African American with well over 50% of the students on free and reduced lunch.

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<sup>13</sup> iMovie is a video editing program created by Apple Computers.

While I observed Cooper's classroom practice, I noticed that she enjoyed a technologically-rich environment. However, she endured a long battle with the administrator in order to attain the resources in her classroom which housed 25 computers, one laser printer, two color printers, and contemporary computer furniture. In what follows, she shared how she resisted the directives of her principal in order to acquire computer technology and accessories for her Black students.

...I was the only teacher teaching vocational education in this school. I found out that \$30,000 came into our school for vocational education. That meant that I should be the only teacher to use it legally, according to the federal guidelines. So I asked my principal and he told me that was too much money for one teacher. "But I'm the only teacher in the building who teaches vocational ed," I responded. We had to go through some steps that he did not particularly like which required me to bring in the Deputy Superintendent and have the budget analyst reprogram all of the money. The principal said "no" at first and the second time he said "hell no! You will not spend \$30,000." So I said "I need to see how it's being spent so that when I make a report to the Department of Education, I will need to identify how the money was used." The Deputy Superintendent did not want to be a part of a scandal because I sent her the guidelines so that she would know how the money should be spent. She called the principal and said that we needed to reprogram because it is federal money. If the Department of Education found out that the money was used for janitorial supplies, the school district could be fined. She realized the seriousness of it. And he told her, "I've been doing this for years...." After that year, I was the only teacher that could use that money. So I've been able to purchase the computers, the scanners, the printers, and supplies for other teachers that I'm doing collaborative projects with. I've gotten this money for 3 years.

Since Cooper had more than enough technology in her classroom, she provided computers and other resources to her teacher colleagues. Thus, her struggle was not for personal gain, rather she saw her struggle as one towards collective empowerment. Therefore, she would not stop advocating for resources until all classrooms serving Black students were fully equipped. This sense of collective responsibility and racial uplift was not uncommon. Hill-Collins points out that

formally educated Black women of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw themselves more as “uplifters” than as working women. Educating poor Black children was part of their moral and social obligation (Hill-Collins, 1990, p. 151).

Cooper also shared information about opportunities to gain additional technological resources with other Roosevelt City Public School teachers. It was not surprising that Cooper spends her time emailing teachers in Roosevelt City Public Schools about different grant opportunities or informing them of their rights as teachers. As mentioned earlier (chapter 4), Jones, along with the rest of the Roosevelt teachers, received an email from Cooper about where her poor students could apply for a personal laptop. Cooper explained, “a lot of the teachers don’t have computers. I saw an opportunity for every school in Roosevelt to get them because that organization promised a laptop lab to every underserved child in the nation, actually in 29 states. I thought to myself that would be 99% of our school. So immediately I saw a lab in every DC school and it was just a matter of getting the teachers to apply for it and getting the information to the students.” Thus, Cooper made it her responsibility to disseminate the necessary information to her teacher colleagues.

### *Summary*

I began this chapter by presenting a portrait of Roosevelt City in order to historically and theoretically situate the work of these transformative Black teachers within the context of an urban city. Because of its historically-segregated nature, the study of the practices of these Black teachers within Roosevelt City Public Schools provides a lens into the challenges, hopes, desires, frustrations, perseverance and

fears associated with educating Black students in an under-resourced, racially segregated schools during the technological age.

I have shown that in Roosevelt City Public Schools, during the period prior to *Board v. Brown*, laws and policies functioned to insure unequal systems of schooling for many poorer Black students. Today, informal structures still exist in Roosevelt City Public Schools. The assumption for many in the dominant group was that with the overturning of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, those Black communities living through “separate but equal” could formally participate and achieve in American society. Now, African Americans and other marginalized groups were responsible for their own success or failure in prospering in the U.S. However, as evidenced by the Roosevelt schooling system, a prototype for many urban schools in the U.S., racist structures still existed post *Brown*. These structures continued to support two schooling systems in Roosevelt and created ongoing challenges for those teachers working in inner-urban schools.

The stories of these transformative teachers participating in this study shed light on the realities of teaching in the inner-urban school fifty years after the *Brown v. Board* decision. These are stories of racial uplift as well as stories of Black teachers providing spaces where their Black students can learn in a digital age. For these three teachers, this included creative ways of locating and maintaining the technological resources necessary to provide their students with a quality education in spite of location and minimal resources.

The following chapters are cases of four transformative Black teachers who utilize computer technology as a transformative tool in the classroom. The teachers’

focus is similar in that they want to educate for “liberation” and yet their practice reveals the spectrum of difference in transformative teaching practice using computer technology. In these chapters, I explore their educational histories, their identity and how that informs their teaching philosophy. Also, within these vignettes, I share their teaching practices and the ways they use computer technology as a counter-hegemonic tool in their classroom.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Introduction to transformative Black teachers**

This study began as an exploration of how four Black teachers integrated computer technology into their teaching practices within the context of inner-urban schools. As the study got underway, I began to focus on each teacher's life and professional experiences as well as how their experiences with racism influenced their pedagogical decisions and their use of computer technology. I discovered that in order to truly understand the nature of teachers' use of computer technology, as an educational tool, I needed to situate its use within their lives, teaching practices and philosophies.

In the following chapters, I will present how these teachers provided spaces for their Black students to learn not only basic academic and technical skills but also skills and knowledge that would help them to navigate within a larger White supremacist society. More specifically, I put forth stories about the ways that these Black educators used computer technology as a transformative tool, in spite of the contradiction of working within a schooling system where racism is reified and perpetuated in ways that could serve to limit their students' participation in U.S. society. These Black teachers countered institutional structures (inferior resources), psychological barriers and controlling stereotypes in order to forge spaces where their Black students were educated.

*Mwongoni Ngona: African American Storytelling*

I name these narratives Mwongoni Ngona, a Kiswahili term developed by Jamel Koram to describe the stories that I tell of these teachers' lives, practices and uses of computer technology. Baba Jamal Koram is a griot, a Pan Afrikan, and a nationalist, who constructed a frame for the storytelling paradigm for African Americans in America. He believes that Mwongoni Ngona, (referred throughout as ngona) African American narratives, should be stories of hope, victory, achievement and intent. Most importantly, these stories must be steeped in the traditions of people of African descent (personal communication, May 20, 2004) . It is in this same tradition that I share the stories, Mwongoni Ngona, of these four transformative teachers; Kathy Jones, Kofi Jefferson, Michael St. John and Christina Cooper.

*Mwongoni Ngona: An African tapestry*

Each ngona reflects the life history, teaching philosophy and teaching practices of each of the four Black teachers as it relates to their use of computer technology. In this sense, computer technology becomes a lens for trying to understand how these teachers address new issues of access to resources within the digital age. These three strands are woven together, similar to an African tapestry, to create a portrait of each teacher's pedagogy. Therefore, the use of computer technology is not disconnected from larger social issues, rather it is contextualized within the realities of these teachers' personal, professional and political lives.

### *The role of computer technology*

Each of these Black teachers utilize computer technology as a tool to enhance and support their Black students' opportunities to learn. In each ngona, the four transformative Black teachers used computer technology as a vehicle to re-define, re-conceptualize and re-present what race and racism means in the lives of their students. For example, by using liberating websites on the Internet, each of these teachers, in their own ways, countered negative Black stereotypes, while fostering spaces where their students embrace more positive images and understandings of Blackness.

Additionally, each of these ngona highlights the commonalities and differences in the ways that each teacher thinks about the uses of computer technology as a tool to help their students address issues of race and racism in their teaching practices. All of their practices were different and yet all of these teachers were bonded by the common experiences of being Black and wanting their Black students to develop not only computer technology skills, but also a sense of personal and cultural identity. As the ngona will demonstrate, computer technology was used with purpose.

### *The participants*

These four transformative Black teachers are remarkably similar and yet different in many ways. In addition to commonalities in age and race, these teachers are all Black and in their 50's. They each have been teaching for over twenty years.

They deem access to and culturally-relevant uses of computer technology as critical to the education of Black children. Most importantly, all of these Black teachers have experienced racism; as a result, they shared a collective commitment to and sense of responsibility toward children of African descent.

Two of the participants, Kofi and Cooper, grew up in the South and moved to Roosevelt City at young ages. After matriculating through the Roosevelt school system, they pursued other careers and eventually decided to stay in Roosevelt City and pursue teaching. Jones, on the other hand, moved to Roosevelt City with her husband and daughter in the 1980's. I consider the teaching practices of both Kofi and Jones African-centered in nature since they both attempted to build connections to Africa and the Diaspora as a way to teach their students about themselves using the Internet and other computer-related technologies. St. John, on the other hand, grew up in Guyana. He moved to the U.S. in his early twenties and spent most of his life teaching special education populations. In his ngona, his teacher population is comprised of all Black boys labeled "emotionally disturbed." I would consider both Cooper and St. John what Lynn (2001) refers to as critical race pedagogues. Both teachers underscore critical dialogue and the development of student voice in their teaching practice.

In the next four chapters, I present the ngona of these four transformative Black teachers. I will focus on their life experiences, teaching philosophy and use of computer technology within each thematic unit. Following these chapters, I will present my conclusions and implications for further research.

## **Kathy Jones**

**“I’m not afraid of wrinkles and of gray hair, I am afraid of an old mind”**

### *Background*

In the two years that I have known Kathy Jones, she always struck me as caring, warm and generous as well as extraordinarily knowledgeable. Jones taught all levels of graphic arts in an inner-urban high school in Roosevelt City. Throughout the thematic unit I observed that she assumed the position of “other mother” while attempting to nurture a strong classroom community among her Black students as a teacher. Of most importance to her was the desire to connect her teaching directly to her Black student’s personal and cultural lives.

This ngona tells how Jones addressed the state-mandated computer technology standards while designing a thematic unit that provided a space for her students to understand their African heritage as well as cultured-centered themes such as resistance, perseverance and racial uplift for people of African descent. Part of her goal was to use the Internet to expose her Black students to culture-centered resources. In addition, Jones utilized other computer-related technologies as a presentation tool to help her students disseminate their digitized work to a wider audience. In what follows, I share Jones’s story. I begin with how her life experiences influenced her teaching practice. This will be followed by her philosophy about the uses of computer technology. This ngona closes with a look within her teaching practice and transformations.

On my first visit, I planned to meet Kathy Jones in the front office of Western High School so that she could escort me to her classroom. I intuitively knew who Jones was when she excitedly greeted me with a warm, bright smile and an energetic “Hello!” With three colored pencils in one hand, she reached out and shook my hand with the other. As we turned around to walk towards her classroom, I noticed her flowing brown hair with highlights of blond. She dressed in soft, pink leggings and a pink tee shirt and slippers. She radiated a youthful and inviting energy.

I immediately felt comfortable in her calming presence. As we walked to her classroom, around the corner from the main office, Jones explained that this particular class was kinetic, as opposed to other classes that were more auditory or visual. Each class, she expressed, had its own personality, so she taught her students’ accordingly. By acknowledging the diversity between her students, Jones seemed to demonstrate at the onset that she took a personal interest in her students. She understood how they learned and made efforts to conform her teaching to meet her students’ needs.

As Jones escorted me through the building, I absorbed the sights and sounds of my surroundings. The limited light in the hallways made me feel somewhat claustrophobic. At first I noticed that much of the wall space was barren; however, as we neared Jones’ classroom I became aware of a few posters and murals hanging on the walls that affirmed the students’ Black identity. Occasionally, a student would appear in the hallways hurrying to some destination, but, for the most part, the halls were quiet and undisturbed. In the distance, I could hear the sound of the metal detector going off as tardy arrivals made their way through the security measures.

When we arrived at the classroom, I felt as though I had crossed into a different world from that of the dimly lit hallway. I was struck by the vibrant and colorful hangings of student work and African artwork tacked to the walls. The cable television, tuned to Black Entertainment Television (BET), blasted the soulful lyrics of “Just One of those Days.” One student danced back and forth in rhythm to the music, while the rest of the class seemed to be deeply engrossed in painting pictures of fruit. I learned over the next few months that Jones intentionally designed her classroom in ways that invited her students to feel as though it was their space. Since I was particularly interested in the uses of computer technology, I was immediately drawn to two students at the back of the classroom who were working diligently on digitized portfolio projects on desktop computers. They were utilizing Power Point and Photo Deluxe software. I also noticed several other out-dated computers lined-up on a table.

Jones immediately surveyed her class, talked to students individually about their work and then made her way to her desk in the back of the classroom and began to take attendance. As she took attendance, I observed that she still managed to address each of her students’ questions and engaged in conversation. For example, one young man walked up to her and she looked at him and said, “You look stressed out. Ms. Frederick, let me introduce you to John. John just found out that he got suspended for being caught in the hallway with a group of boys who came into the school, but did not go to the school. Tell her what happened.” As we listened to this young man tell his story, Jones assured him that things would be okay and that he would need to be more alert next time. As she closed her attendance book, she ended

the conversation with John by saying, “I value that.” This phrase, “I value that” initially caught me by surprise. I would come to learn that she always expressed how much she valued her students’ thoughts, feelings and ideas. She allowed him to stay until the end of the period and made sure that he had enough homework to do during his absence from school. Later, she revealed that the administration targeted him, because he had prior discipline problems. However, since the beginning of that year, he had turned himself around.

I wrote in my reflective journal on that day,

I can see why Mrs. Jackie Monty<sup>14</sup> immediately suggested Mrs. Jones to study. I can tell that she is open, caring and committed to the education of her students. She knows each child by name, their individual moods and their class work. As a result, I can tell that her students know that she cares about them as individuals. She is an expert at multi-tasking—she has several activities going (at once) which to the naked eye could seem chaotic. But in reality her practice is congruent with the needs of her students. I can tell right now that her classroom practice will be difficult to capture for it is quite complex.

### *The Evolution of Teaching Identity*

Jones was born in Missouri. At an early age, she knew that her calling was to be an artist.

All my life I wanted to be an artist like my uncle... He was an illustrator for aeronautical charts and I would watch him do assignments and paint signs and things when I was a little girl. As a little girl I would run around the dining room table and I would always stop and watch him painting and drawing. So I knew I loved art...I was the only one in the family. All of the other children went into business. I was the one that went into art... That’s why I wanted to have the Master’s in Fine Arts because that’s the final declaration of being an

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<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Monty is a personal friend who served as vice principal of the school. She introduced me to Mrs. Jones.

art person. It's the declaration that you are an artist...I declared that as my major—even in high school.

In the years that followed, Jones developed her talents as an artist. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in French, education, and studio art from Washington University before pursuing her life dream of being an artist and teacher. Before coming to Roosevelt, Jones had an array of professional experiences. She reflected,

I taught at a university, Stowe College, which is a teacher's college. And I was an associate professor at Southern Illinois University for Art Education for a year. I was an ad hoc professor in studio art. Then, I moved to New York City and taught in Spanish Harlem at a parochial school and began an art education program there.

In addition to these teaching experiences, Jones also worked in the capacity of a freelance graphics artist with McGraw-Hill and an illustrator for several pamphlets and books.

In 1990, Jones moved to Roosevelt City with her young daughter and began teaching at Langston Hughes School of Performing Arts, a magnet school located in an affluent area of Roosevelt. She felt at home while teaching at Langston Hughes Art School. She shared that,

it [was] an enclave for artists and art educators. I was in a pulsating environment of art with students who loved art. And I felt like I was in heaven because the art teachers were teaching in their genre of ability and expressing their art and pulling art from the students and the students were creating art. And that was an invigorating experience for me because we were thinkers and just entrenched in art aesthetics and art people are so volatile, passionate that that seemed to stimulate a lot of my educational growth.

As Jones expressed, she thrived in the creative environment where other teacher-colleagues held the same vision and philosophies about art as she did.

Unfortunately, her time at Hughes Art School was short. Due to budget cuts, Jones

was transferred to Western High School, much to the dismay of her teacher-colleagues and students. At the onset, Jones noticed that the neighborhood and school environment at Western High contrasted that of Hughes Art School. Western High School is situated in a beautiful residential neighborhood in the northeastern section of the Roosevelt City. Unlike the magnet art school located in a historical wealthy White section of Roosevelt City, a school that attracted talented youth from all areas of the city, Western High School was a neighborhood school that comprised 99.5% African American students. Seventy-seven percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. Test scores in 2001 showed that more than 82% and 45% of the student population received below basic scores in math and reading respectively. In addition, high administrative turn-over and threats to reconstitute the school continued to plague Western.

Although the atmosphere of high stakes testing and state mandates in Western was pressure filled, Jones grew to love her new place of employment, her colleagues and her students. Her new position was teaching graphics arts to 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders.

### *The Merging of Identity and Pedagogy*

#### Building Community

Jones viewed her pedagogy as intricately linked to her childhood experiences. She seemed to consider building community, striving for high expectations, and nurturing her students essential components of her culturally-relevant pedagogy. She believed that teaching was learning. She said that, “teaching is an ever-growing, organic experience. It is an energy exchange of checks and minuses...replacing the old with

expanded new growth. It's an in and out, input/output exchange to me." She expressed that part of her understanding of teaching as an organic experience may have come from her extensive time spent with a high school art teacher. He greatly influenced how she viewed the role of teaching. She explained:

...my high school art teacher was the typical teacher that was given all levels of art to teach- year one, two, three and four. I had him all four years. He was able to evolve with all of his students in the various disciplines and use of media, art media, technique and design. And I valued that because it showed me that he was ever-evolving.

As Jones pointed out, her art teacher believed that teaching is growing. Jones argued that this message was evident in his words as well as his actions. Additionally, he demonstrated to Jones that teaching was not only about growth with regard to knowledge, but also, growth as a person. Jones seemed to take away from her favorite instructor that growth as a teacher occurs in response to students' needs.

Childhood experiences strongly influenced Jones' teaching philosophy. For example, Jones's familial experiences shaped her classroom practices. She tells that as a child she learned that there was power in numbers. She recalled as she smiled to herself:

I had lots of cousins and uncles. There was the power in numbers. We could take down the biggest bully. I realized that I could not handle all of them unless I knew them all. [Therefore I] got to know each cousin for a little bit. That is it...spending time getting to know each person on a one-one level.

This philosophy of getting to know each person individually and building connections transferred to her classroom practice. She contended that it was essential to get to know each and every child. She has found, over the course of over 30 years of teaching, that by building trusting relationships, her students developed a classroom

community. They were not only open to her, but they also developed positive relationships with each other. During an observation I reflected that:

I noticed that Mrs. Jones takes time out to call each student by name, to ask each student how he or she is doing and to pay close attention to their non-verbal communication. In addition, class projects represent another way of getting to know her students. They are individualized and personal and allow for each student to express who they are on an intimate level. She encourages her students to delve into and to explore their life experiences in order to produce projects that symbolize their personal goals and aspirations. Since the atmosphere in her classroom allows for students to interact amongst themselves, students and teacher together build a classroom community in which all members are getting to know themselves and their classmates simultaneously. Thus, concepts such as unity and collective agency are underscored as opposed to individuality and competition (field notes).

Jones saw herself as a surrogate parent to her student. As a mother, she took time out every day to talk or observe her daughter. She adopted the same principles while teaching. During an interview, Jones further explained how she developed personal relationships with students.

I look in their faces and it takes me about two to three weeks-I may not know all of their names correctly but I make it a point to get to know them. I try to get to know the person so that I can see when they are on course and when they are off course.

[I would see myself as] a momentary guide and a family member and I wish them well. And I look forward to seeing the growth spurts. I have individual goals for each student. I try to get into their little personalities and I look into their faces. I tell them in the beginning of the year that I do not know them, but that I look forward to meeting them, and I watch their little faces and see when they are happy or sad or down. I tell them that I will not bother them or drive them nuts until I find out what I need to know so that they can be the best person that they need to be. And they know that I will do that.

Jones utilized her keen insights in conjunction with ongoing dialogue in order to stay in tune to her students' emotional well being. Thus, her job seemed to transcend that of imparter of knowledge and assessor of her student's work to include striving to get

to know the whole student. In this case, like a parent, she strived to know her students and their capabilities. In addition, she took the time to gauge their emotions and their feelings so that she could intuitively sense her students' needs.

Furthermore, 'fictive parenting' was evidenced by her desire to foster an environment of loyalty. She explicitly let students know that they could depend on her inside and outside the classroom.

### High Expectations

In addition to striving to build a cohesive classroom community, Jones stressed the importance of holding high expectations for her students. She explained that powerful experiences as a child helped to shape her understanding of how vital a positive perception from a teacher to a student can be in building academic confidence and self esteem. During a conversation, she recalled her own experiences while attending school during integration. She was one of six Black students in an all-White classroom. The Black students were middle class children of doctors, lawyers and educators. They were exceptional students who out-performed their White counterparts academically to the chagrin of the White teacher. Jones recalled that the White teacher held extraordinarily low expectations for her Black students to the point that the teacher was literally "sickened" by the success of the Black students. Jones remembered, "she would try to stifle our learning and stifle our ability." She added, however, that this incident was a learning experience. Although she carried out her responsibilities as a student, her academic prowess and success was greeted with hostility and contempt from the White instructor.

She has never forgotten the aforementioned experience with racism. In this case, Jones felt firsthand what it was like for a teacher to hold low expectations for a student, more specifically a Black student. Although Jones knew her potential and ability, she found that her strengths remained unrecognized and ignored by her teacher. She expressed that as a result of this and other similar foundational experiences, she became committed to fostering an environment where all of her students know and believe that they can achieve academically. Furthermore, she was committed to providing a space where her students' Blackness were affirmed and uplifted. She argued that it was essential for teachers to concentrate on what their students can do as opposed to what their students can not do.

As part of her attempt to affirm her students Blackness, Jones deconstructed negative Black stereotypes in an attempt to re-define and broaden the construct of "Blackness." During the first day of observation, Jones began by offering statistics that countered the negative images about the plight of the Black community. Reading from literature disseminated by the McDonald's corporation, she shared the following empowering statistical data about Black Americans to the class:

Jones: There are 37 million African Americans in the United States and 52% are female. There are 96,000 Black engineers; whether it be mechanic, electrical or what have you; there are 41,000 Black physicians; there are 47,000 Black lawyers, 1/3 of all African Americans are under the age of 18. Forty-seven percent of African Americans are homeowners. So do not believe that we are not homeowners, we are homeowners okay....And last but not least, for over 1/3 of African Americans have average incomes of \$50,000.

She worked hard to give students insight and a more nuanced account of Black socio-economic reality. By naming the above statistics about the Black community's economic status, she challenged the prevailing stereotype that most African

Americans are on welfare or drugs. As important, she provided an opportunity for her students to believe that they could become a doctor, lawyer or homeowner, although they may not see many examples in their immediate surroundings. Jones wanted her students to transcend the pervasive negative and limited images generated by mass media and controlling ideologies in order to seek more positive representations of Blackness.

As we discussed the different dimensions of Jones' life, I came to understand how various experiences as a Black woman growing up and living in the U.S. influenced her teaching practices. I noticed, in particular, how issues of race, racism and African cultural identification became integral to her form of transformative pedagogy. In the following section, I shed light on her unique and complex teaching practice.

#### *Perspectives of the Internet and Computer related Technologies*

Jones taught an interdisciplinary computer graphics course at Western High School for all grade levels. In the course syllabus, she described the course as follows:

The course introduces computer graphics, computer art, desktop publishing, digital photography and digital camera for use in the classroom. Students will learn how to create business cards and scan photographs. Drawing and painting software are used to create publications, newsletters, brochures, business cards and scanned photographs.

Her course objectives were aligned with Roosevelt City Public School computer technology standards that expect Roosevelt City Public School students to use painting and drawing tools to produce graphic images and develop multimedia

projects. While Jones met all of Roosevelt City Public School's computer technology standards, this ngona will describe how Jones transcended the technology standards and used computer technology as a teaching tool to meet her students' cultural and personal needs. In fact, meeting her students' personal and cultural needs was a priority; computer technology as one of many media to help facilitate instruction, became a way to achieve this goal.

Jones believed that the Internet and computer-related technologies were powerful teaching tools. She asserted that by using the Internet, "I can take these students to a farm community; I can take these students to the Ancient Pyramids in Africa; to the Louvre, and I can take these students to look at the Tower of Pisa. I can take them to Spain to see Balboa the new architecture..." In other words, just like the other transformative teachers in this study, Jones recognized that by utilizing the Internet, her students would experience simulations that would allow them access to physical spaces that they, under normal circumstances, might only read about in a book.

Jones' recognized the power of the Internet as a medium to tap into African-centered ways of knowing and being. In other words, she wanted her Black students to access relevant knowledge that would help them to develop a cultural consciousness centered on Blackness. Therefore, she believed that information accessed on the computer must be culturally meaningful and relevant to her students' living in the inner-urban context.

In this way, computer technology was used to support Jones' African-centered pedagogical practice. It served as a medium to help her students understand the

interconnections between ancient Africa and Africans living in the Americas. She also attempted to provide a foundation that would help her Black students re-conceptualize and re-define their identities in ways that countered more overt White supremacist logic and Black degradation reproduced by stereotypical images seen daily in commercial media. Likewise, she desired for her students to challenge more subtle and indirect forms of racism encountered through relationships, institutions, corporate businesses, and the legal system. By using content found on the Internet, she legitimized the contributions and stories of knowledge by and for African and African American people. In addition, she supported African cultural continuity while promoting critical consciousness. For example, she recognized that by tapping into certain liberatory websites, her students could possibly be exposed to different cultures and lifestyles that they might never experience otherwise.

That being said, Jones makes it a part of her professional responsibility to stay abreast of current computer technology devices, software programs and websites so that she can integrate these tools into her teaching practice. She expressed that she leapt at any opportunity to learn about computer technology. During one conversation, she mentioned that when she first arrived at Roosevelt in 1990, she heard that Roosevelt City Public Schools offered free technology classes:

After we moved here I heard that they were offering classes at Dell School. At that time, that was the hub for computer education ...as soon as I heard about the computer technology I wanted to know about it. The only thing now is I wish I had gone to get a master's in computer technology earlier because I would have been in the forefront rather than one of the many fish in the sea.

She regrets not pursuing a degree in computer technology. Notwithstanding, since being a Roosevelt City Public School teacher, she has not missed an opportunity to

take part in the free computer technology classes offered. At times, she sacrificed nights and summers to hone her skills or to learn the latest software programs.

Because Jones was purposeful about the integration of computer technology in her classroom practice, she was deeply cognizant of its limitations. She fundamentally believed that computer technology should only be used if it enhances her students' projects. She asserted that, "computer technology is an extension of the hand and a necessary tool to build onto my students' natural talent." In saying this, she believed that computer technology, when used well, could add more sophisticated dimensions to her students' work. However, Jones cautioned educators to be mindful that it should only be used to "extend ... natural talent" not to substitute talent. In her classroom, students' processed and produced professional images that they would not normally be able to design by hand alone via drawing or painting.

One of the most important ways that she used computer technology in her classroom was to provide an environment where her students learned both practical skills and life lessons. During a conversation, she illuminated the importance of connecting computer technology to her students' life as a teaching strategy. Throughout the semester that I observed her teaching, she focused on the concept of "presentation." By presentation, she meant the visual layout of an editorial, as well as the verbal presentation utilizing PowerPoint software, and other computer-related technologies. Although a presentation skill set could be developed without the use of computer technology, Jones believed that in the new millennium, it was her responsibility to make sure that her students were familiar with highly visual, hyperlinked, and sound-induced modes of presenting. Therefore her instruction

related to computer technology was not only concerned with accessing culturally-relevant information, but it also entailed providing her students with ongoing opportunities to disseminate and defend culturally empowering, digitally-enhanced information.

For example, Jones took full advantage of a technologically enhanced “presentation exercise” to attempt to instill in her Black students necessary life skills. Her students practiced presenting their PowerPoint generated projects and responding to peer critique. By doing this, she attempted to provide her students with the skills that would allow them to think, reflect, and justify their actions. Jones hoped that this presentation skill exercise would transfer to their lives outside of the classroom.

Aside from computer technology serving as vehicle to expose her students to liberatory resources and as an enhancement and presentation tool, she envisioned, in the future, utilizing computer technology for multi-media interviews, long distance interviews and satellite classroom exchange programs with other students across the world. Jones saw her role as developing the necessary skills to teach her students about the power and possibilities of computer technology. To this end, it was Jones’ hope that the Internet and computer related software would expose her Black students to culture-centered resources. In addition, she saw technology as a means for her students to develop skills for negotiating in U.S. society.

*The Thematic Unit: Digitized Representations of the Amistad*

Description

Over the course of two years, I watched Jones present the thematic unit, the Amistad, with several classes. In the following account, I will describe Jones' teaching philosophy and how it was manifest in her classroom practice using computer technology. In particular, I will present the major components of the thematic unit, demonstrating how Jones integrated the Internet and computer technology into various components of the unit. The goal here was to expose her students to African-centered culture and to utilize computer technology and related software as a vehicle to help her students manifest their images. This chapter will close with my analysis of how her students' thinking changed throughout the process.

According to Jones, the purpose of the Amistad thematic unit was to develop a sense of internalization in her students of their African cultural past. Throughout the year, Jones designed a number of computer-enhanced thematic units that incorporated her students' personal experiences while simultaneously connecting them to a range of African concepts, experiences and ideas. More specifically, Jones wanted her students to understand how their ancestors persevered and resisted the horrors of slavery. With this in mind, Jones attempted to foster an environment where students began to develop an understanding and valuing of their cultural heritage.

Hence, Jones used computer technology as a counter-hegemonic tool, called such because it allowed her students to access knowledge rarely discussed or studied in the "official curriculum" in two ways. First, the computer technology was utilized as a conduit to expose her students to a proliferation of empowering, African-centered

material in cyberspace; second, her students used software programs such as Power Point, PhotoDeluxe and Microsoft Word as presentation tools to re-design, re-produce and re-present images about the Middle Passage. In this way, she used computer technology to challenge dominant relationships of power that sustained racism in and out of school. To this end, computer technology was utilized as a means to access and present invaluable information about the perseverance, resilience and resistance of people of African descent.

Jones began the thematic unit by engaging her students in a discussion about the producer, Debbie Allen, and her intentions for the movie, *TheAmistad* . The Amistad is a story about a group of Africans who were captured in Mendi (present day Sierra Leone) and brought in chains to the North America. The enslaved Africans, led by Singbe, revolted, captured their ship, La Amistad, and eventually were seized off the coast of New England. The African captives won their freedom in a case before the United States Supreme Court and ultimately sailed back to their homeland in Africa.

Her students spent several days viewing and discussing the movie. They learned about and designed spot drawings that reflected important themes that emerged from the viewing of the movie. The final activity in the thematic unit consisted of students digitally enhancing their images and writing editorial statements about an aspect of the movie that most resonated with them. All of the spot drawings, including editorial statements, were bound into a book and downloaded to CD. It was Jones' hope that as a result of the project, more of her students, as well as the larger community, would learn the Amistad story and the triumph of Black people.

Before the initial conversation about Allen, Jones told me that she began preparing her students for the Amistad thematic unit by having them design a ‘name project’. She felt that the name project would help her students understand the origins and importance of their names. As part of the assignment, Jones showed them how to produce digitally enhanced self-portrait based on the new-found knowledge of the meanings of their names. Jones explained how she approached this project,

I begin the school year from the “I” perception, who I am and what I am about. They look up their name (in September). They take their existing names and research the origins of their names and find out their definitions and what countries and dialects they evolved from and their combination blend using the Internet. Many of my students’ names are Afrocentric .... They learn what their name means and the origins. Then we talk about portraiture and they take self-portraits with this eyeball camera. They learn digital photography and then they do several portraits of themselves which becomes part of their virtual portfolio.

This project makes us see the strength behind our culture and where we have come from as African Americans.

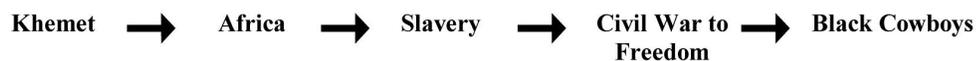
By doing the naming project, Jones hoped to provide her students entrée into their African culture. She attempted to build linkages between their names and their African identity. By beginning with their names and then by creating self-portraits, Jones allowed her students to build on their personal strengths and to present their images as Black students. Based on their new understandings of their name, as influenced by their African heritage, Jones encouraged her students to use the computer technology to re-discover, re-present, re-affirm and re-define who they were and how they wanted to project themselves.

Jones officially began the Amistad thematic unit by writing the following diagram on the black board.

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**Figure 2. Diagram of the African/ African American Continuum**



Her students sat at tables shaped in a U and listened intently as she briefly explained the diagram and the importance of knowing their geographical and cultural source. She began with the contributions of ancient Khemet, which she referred to as the beginning of civilization, and drew connections between ancient Khemet and Africa to Slavery, the Civil War and the Black Cowboys.

I highlight two important points about Jones' practice. Jones problematized traditional canons normally found in public school curriculum by challenging the origins of civilization. Along with other African-centered scholars she asserted that civilization began in Africa (Diop, 1974; Asante, 1991; Akoto, 1992). By bringing forth Khemet, as the root of civilization, she was legitimizing the contributions of African people in the "official" school curriculum. Jones also delineated the lineage between Khemet and the Black cowboys, demonstrating this trajectory in ways that connected her students' African American experience to ancient Khemet. In other words, Jones, in her teaching, attempted to help her students see themselves as culturally, socially, and historically connected to Africa. This diagram was left on the board throughout the course of the entire thematic unit as a constant reminder of the connections between ancient KMT and present day Africans living in the Diaspora.

Next, Jones turned her attention to the story of the Amistad. Students learned, in great detail, the story of Debbie Allen and her desire to turn the small tome she found at the Howard University library into a movie entitled *The Amistad*. By highlighting Allen's story, she demonstrated how Allen developed her own sense of Black consciousness.

As part of her teaching practice, she wanted to push students to think about what counts as knowledge in the official curriculum. More specifically, she wanted her students to recognize that African stories of perseverance and resistance are often marginalized or eliminated from the official school curriculum as illustrated by the following example.

Jones: Debbie Allen was a freshman in college. The original book was small and that was the story that she wanted to bring to her people. Her dream was to relay this information to you. Has anyone seen this in the history books?

Students in unison: No

Dante: They don't have stories like these in our books.

Shante: They don't want us to know.

Students: Nodded their heads in agreement.

Jones: This is important and I don't know where we would be if we did not have movies or books like this. I want you to share this with your children and your family. So you can search the Internet and find this information.

As I explain Jones' teaching of the Amistad unit, I underscore three important points. On one level, Jones is critical of the kind of knowledge that counts in school. By asking, "has anyone seen this in the history books?" she wanted her students to become aware of what counts as "official" knowledge and the kind of information that is left out. Secondly, Jones shared with students how to locate marginalized knowledge. She drew clear distinctions between the kind of knowledge found in the "official" school curriculum and the kind of the knowledge found on the Internet. In

other words, the “official” curriculum is controlled (Apple, 2001) as opposed to the Internet, which includes a multiplicity of voices. She stated, “you can go on the Internet and find this information.” In saying this, she recognized that the World Wide Web includes spaces for liberatory ways of knowing for people of African descent. Unlike the “official school curriculum” the Internet, could serve as a resource where students could locate the contributions and little known stories about people of African descent. Finally, Jones urged her students to spread this story to their families and communities. In the same way Allen pressed forth to share the Amistad, she held her students accountable for continuing the rich legacy and stories of struggle, resistance, and faith of their African ancestors.

As the unit progressed, Jones then showed the movie, “The Amistad,” to her class. As students watched the movie, Jones narrated from the back of the room explaining different aspects of the story. The showing was followed by a class discussion about concepts such as symbolism (e.g., shackles, sun) as well as ways the movie connected to her students’ daily lives.

After viewing the movie, Jones’ students designed spot drawings based on an important theme or symbol developed in the movie. In this context, a spot drawing refers to a detailed sketch of an image. During this class, Jones taught her students about page layout and editorial statements. Using samples of page layout from “Essence Magazine,” a popular woman’s magazine in the Black community, Jones taught her students fundamental designs and proper terminology for page layout. In addition, she taught her students how to write an editorial statement. In the following excerpt, Jones explained the process.

We look at the style of writing and we dissect the anatomy of the page. We learn identification components. I have them write an editorial based on one component of the movie that impressed them. We began to use style and page layout. I taught them the difference between illustration and page layout. Each student had to illustrate—do a spot drawing, an image supported by the writing.

Here, Jones not only expects her students to understand graphics, but also to understand the theory behind graphic design and page anatomy. Although her class focused on graphic arts, her teaching practice, interdisciplinary in its approach, also included the skill of writing. Since many of her students' scored poorly on the reading portion of the standardized test, Jones constantly encouraged writing throughout the course of the thematic unit. She reminded her students that regardless of artistic talent, each student was expected to construct a spot drawing.

After her students completed the spot drawing, Jones wanted them to scan the images into the computer so that each spot drawing would be digitally enhanced. Unfortunately, throughout much of the thematic unit, the scanner was broken. Instead, Jones asked her students to capture their spot drawing images on digital camera and stream the images into the computer.

After transferring the images to the computer, Jones demonstrated how to manipulate images to meet her students' personal needs. During an observation, students gathered around the computer, some standing, some on the floor, some pulled up chairs and watched as Jones digitally transformed the image of a Kinte cloth outfit. She used Photodeluxe software, an outdated version of Photoshop software, as well as PowerPoint to demonstrate how students could shrink images, flip images and change dimensions and colors. Here, she pushed students to think

about ways they could transform their spot drawing to design a concept using the computer technology and their imagination in ways that they could not do by hand. When she finished the mini-lesson, she stated, “you have control over what the viewer sees.” Jones urged her students to think of themselves as the creators and the constructors of images for and about their African culture.

Since computer technology was limited in the classroom (see Chapter 4), Jones encouraged her students to take turns and pair or triple up while using the computer technology. While some students worked on designing their spot drawing, other students went on-line to capture images and symbols that would aid them in completing their spot drawing.

I observed Marcus as he conducted a Google search typical of the searches conducted by Jones’ students. Using the “images” database, he typed in the word “Amistad” and located several primary document such as slave ships and slave ports. By ‘back tracking’, or clicking on “related links” within the web pages he visited, he was able to locate more images that he found useful. He found slave cabins and slave houses in the South. He called over his classmates when he was able to locate an illustrator that drew pictures of the Amistad. He collected and saved each of the images on a diskette provided by Jones.

As a culminating exercise, Jones’ students created two books in the form of compact discs called “Amistad” and “Amistad Extended.” Additionally, each of her students created a personalized compact disc, a digitized portfolio which held the digitized book and other digitized projects each student created throughout the year. Jones wanted the friends, family, employers, potential admission directors at colleges

and universities, the local Roosevelt community as well as those outside of Roosevelt to learn about Amistad and to see samples of her students' work. In addition, the work was to be put on the Internet, which, in turn, invited an international audience to view the project. Finally, the "Amistad," the book, was to be displayed at the exhibit hall when the re-constructed ship docked at waterfront in Roosevelt City; however, as will be explained later, the Amistad book was displayed at a local library instead.

In the next section, I will highlight Jones' specific pedagogical approach. Ongoing liberatory dialogue and individualized instruction became the point of departure for her classroom instruction.

*Transformative Pedagogy Using the Internet and Computer-related Technologies*  
Critical Dialogue: "Oh, that's where we got that from!"

Throughout my observations, I noticed that Jones underscored themes such as freedom, liberation, and resistance. In her mind, these themes were critical to the experiences of people of African descent. Therefore, these themes, in many cases, provided the basis for many of her classroom discussions. In the following examples, I will demonstrate how these themes informed her classroom practice and how she attempts to help her students build connections from Africa to the Diaspora.

As mentioned earlier, Jones narrated throughout the viewing of the movie, "The Amistad." As the movie began, the class watched as Sengbe, the main character tried to reach a key to unlock his shackles. In this excerpt, I demonstrate how Jones began her narration focusing on themes of freedom and leadership in this way.

Jones: All he [Sengbe] can think about is his freedom. He has nothing to cling to but liberation. His fingers began to bleed, but he knows that if he can get the key, he is free. Then there is a raid. He tries to commit suicide, but he realizes that his people need him. So he comes back up to the top of the icy cold water. That is called leadership people. Leadership. Notice how they chain their necks, hands and feet.

In this narration, Jones pointed out the complexity of human nature. She reiterated that Sengbe pulled at the nail until his finger bled and that his initial desire was to commit suicide in order to be freed from captivity. In the end, she shared that his desire to endure the trials of enslavement and to lead his “brothers” won out, but not without serious contemplation. Jones rhetorically ended her narration by posing the question to her students, “is there a time when you had to make a decision to sacrifice yourself to help your community?” It seemed that Jones wanted to help her students build connections between Sengbe’s struggle and their daily experiences.

As part of her classroom discourse, Jones not only focused on mental strength, but also the physical strength of enslaved African men and women. During a scene in Africa when Sengbe and his fellow countrymen were captured by Spaniards, a student yelled out, “we were strong!” Jones took this as an opportunity to affirm not only their African ancestors’ greatness, but to point out that Europeans stole the most physically fit Africans, men, women and children.

Jones: We are some of the strongest people on the earth. Notice how they stole the children as well as the women. They hadn’t seen anything as firm.

Jones pointed out that when the Spaniards invaded Africa they selected what they perceived to be the best of the lot based only on the enslaved African’s physical appearance. Jones’s addressing of this issue was important because it represented the beginning of the dehumanizing process of African people. In other words, meanings

were given to African people's physique that was devoid of culture, intelligence and spirituality. However, here it seemed as though Jones wanted her students to understand that they are the descendants of greatness. In other words, they were the children of Africans who were both physically and mentally strong as evidenced by the reality that they lived through horrendous treatment during the middle passage and enslavement. Yet, Africans in America still survived and flourished.

Jones' discourse also revealed that she wanted her students to pay close attention to African rituals and ways of knowing. For example, during one scene Sengbe called to the ancestors for help and assurance. Jones focused on this scene and advised her students to call to the ancestors when they have lost all hope. She shared with the class,

Jones: This is my favorite part in the movie when he calls to the ancestors. When everyone is against you and there is no hope...you honor the ancestors.

Wisdom and strength will come to Sengbe's aid when he calls to the ancestors.

In the spirit of African tradition, Jones pointed out here that it is important to recognize the ancestors when they feel in despair. In a sense, she provided her students with a way of coping with their situations by looking beyond their physical realm for answers. To this end, Jones pointed out that it is important for her Black students to look toward their personal ancestors, grandparents and great grandparents, who endured innumerable trials and tribulation, as a source of strength.

I noticed that students began to build their own connections between present day rituals with African ways. In one scene, Sengbe and his African brother shook hands, and brought their fists to their hearts in what I referred to as the "black hand

shake.” The students became excited and broke out in laughter. One boy yelled out, “Oh, that’s where we got that from.” The rest of the class laughed and yelled out “yeah!” in agreement. Important about this interaction was that students recognized for themselves that certain cultural traditions and mores are rooted in African tradition.

At the conclusion of the movie, Jones reemphasized the connection between her students and their African ancestry.

Jones: Raise your hands if you saw this movie before. We can do anything on the face of the earth. I wanted you to see this because I wanted you to know that you can do anything. If you go to Adam’s Morgan and you see people that look like you, go to them and ask them where they are from. They are from Africa. They recognize us, but we don’t recognize them.  
 Samatha: When I first saw the movie, I didn’t understand why the woman was crying.  
 Jones: Now you understand, right?  
 Samatha nods yes.

In this excerpt, Jones emphasized that as a result of the trials their ancestors faced, Black people today could accomplish any goal since they are descendants of a legacy of people who have persevered. By saying “they recognize us” she was encouraging her students to begin to see themselves as descendants of Africa.

### Individualized Instruction

Jones counseled individually with each student at various stages of the thematic unit. She helped her students conceptualize their projects and design their spot drawings. Most importantly, she provided students with ongoing assistance on how to use the graphic design software packages.

Jones students varied in their comfort and ability level in working with the computer technology. Therefore, she developed structures in her classroom to help

her to manage her teaching practice as it related to the infusion of technology. Jones spent most of her time working with students individually on their projects. While some students worked with the mixed media, paints, colored pencils and water colors, at the art tables, other students took turns working on scanning their spot drawing into the computer and manipulating their images on the three available computers. This system allowed her time to work with her students one-on-one at the computer.

The following interactions are examples of how Jones worked individually with students and pushed them to think about their spot drawings and digitized multi-media images. In the first case, Sam is conceptualizing his spot drawing. Jones was sitting next to him, providing suggestions that would help him to connect the movie to his own life.

Jones: What are some of your thoughts? What are some of the profound symbolisms in the *Amistad*?

Sam: Slavery

Jones: How would you show that? You could show feet or shoes. You could take four or five peoples' shoes off and photograph that. You could show slavery and then the middle passage. There are many ways to walk down a street. So what would that look like?

Sam: Slavery; like an image of window...

Jones: What are some of the symbols that you would use to represent slavery.

Sam: Shackles, I would use shackles.

Jones: So you could take a sign, which is representation of segregation period, Klans and murders and you could do a time capsule of the "no blacks allowed" and then shackles open. So the shackles which are usually closed would mean you are enslaved and the shackles open on each side, could mean freedom. You could do that. You could do shackles and chains and you could type "no Blacks allowed still..."

I wrote in my journal notes that Sam's ongoing commentary in the classroom focuses on the continued existence of racism and prejudice. I suspect that this is why she directed his attention to examples of more contemporary symbols of invisible slavery,

“no Blacks allowed” and “no Blacks allowed still.” Sam continued to explain his vision,

Sam (He points to the beginnings of the image that would become his spot drawing and begins to explain his concept): This is like Sengbe and this is a baby and this is a shackle...

Jones pushed her student to think about different ways to present the images.

Knowing his interests and his concerns, she encouraged him to think about juxtaposing present day racism with the racism and oppression experienced by Africans who lived through the Middle Passage.

In this next instance Jones sat with her student at a computer terminal as they worked through the presentation design and more technical issues.

Jones: Color-use color. You have a lot of other symbols in there too; you have the water, waves, and you have ...

Marcus: the shackles

Jones: And, you have the shackles, you have to make these a little bigger (She showed him how to enlarge the image on the computer). And pull these pieces together for freedom. So you have a lot of pieces already going there. So what we are going to do?...you know that the page layout is usually vertical, unless you want to make yours horizontal. Now we could do that (She talked him through changing the page layout). You could turn this into Amistad extended. You could hold the page out like this: you can have it up the side or diagonal. You could move some of the things around. You could make this smaller. Do you want to make this smaller? (Marcus changes the size) Now this is good. This is really good.

At this point, she turns to me and says, “This is a really good job.”

In another interaction, she asked her student to develop an editorial statement that represented the essence of his work. Andre printed out an image drawn with colored pencils and scanned into PhotoDeluxe. His picture, completed in dark grays and blues, was of the Amistad sailing through the middle passage. In the picture, an

African man was tumbling off of the side of the slave ship. He digitally manipulated the drawing to give the impression of a thunderstorm. Jones looked at the picture as it comes out of the printer:

Jones: It looks beautiful, Oh, no! You forgot an editorial statement. How do you want to focus this? Is it his decision to fall over? So in this case, did he jump over, did he physically fall overboard or was his turn coming up?

Michael: I don't know.

Jones (gently asks again): In this experience did he choose to go overboard or was his turn coming up, Michael, what do you think?

Another student chimed in: I think that it is about him jumping overboard.

Jones: Michael, you may want to take a minute. Most males go off and think about things for a moment and come back. So just press "save" and think about this.

I watched as Michael went off by himself and stared at the picture trying to decide what to write. He had a green piece of paper in his hand. He finally came up with, "never give up until freedom is yours." Jones felt this statement captured the image on the page.

### *Transformations*

Throughout the thematic unit, I watched how Jones encouraged her students to listen, question, wrestle and grow while working on their Amistad project. Over the course of the thematic unit, I captured the ways that her students' thinking evolved as evidenced by their comments and work.

Many of her Black students began to see themselves as people of African descent. Throughout the structured activities, computer technology was used as a conduit for research and as a vehicle for manifesting and re-presenting images from "the Amistad." Computer technology used in this way aided her students in "un-muting" the voices and stories of struggle and resistance of African people. I

observed the transformations of Jones' students during their first activity during Black History Month.

Each year, during Black History Month, Jones and her students embarked on the Amistad project. In public schools around the country, February, is the "official" time in which African and African American history, scholarship and contributions are invited to be a part of the curriculum in the form of readings, films and special school events. Jones utilized this time to increase the intensity of her year-long focus of Africans in the U.S. and the larger Diaspora.

Jones began Black History Month with a focus on famous Black cultural heroes. On this day, I watched as she passed out literature on well-known and obscure African American cultural heroes published by the McDonald's Corporation. Each student was asked to read, summarize, and present key facts to the class about the cultural hero they received. One student, who received the card of Martin Luther King Jr. put her head down and said in a loud voice,

Alesia: Mrs. Jones, I am so sick of hearing about Martin Luther King. Every year during Black History Month, its Martin Luther King, Martin Luther King, Martin Luther King. That is all we learn.  
Students: Other students laughed and nodded in agreement.

Upon hearing this I noted in my journal that 20 years later these students are still expressing the same issues that I had concerning the superficiality of Black History month. I attended an all-White private school. These students are located in an inner-city all Black school and yet, our experiences, feelings and frustrations about Black History Month and the non-threatening portrayal of an important cultural hero Martin Luther King Jr. are not so different.

Jones and I later discussed that Black History Month has merely been a time to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. with little regard for the contributions of other Black cultural heroes. As Jones remarked, students have come to dismiss Black History Month and show little interest in their African cultural history and background. According to Jones, when she first met her students, she found that they did not see themselves as people of African descent. It was for this reason that Jones spent so much of her time creating a space where her students could build connections to their African heritage, so that they could develop a “sense of self.”

In response to her students’ concerns, Jones said, “this exercise is to remind us of our roots, of who we are and the presence of those who have gone before us.” She encouraged her students to use Black History Month as an important springboard for further research about people of African descent. She continued:

The birth of the musical movement, art, dress, etc. is always among our people first. We would hear and see it and respond to the way it touched our souls. We are soulful people and it comes out in whether it is the art form of Jacob Lawrence or in the controlled theme in the words of the National Negro Anthem or in the melody of Charles Parker or Louis Armstrong and his saxophone. So again, these are our roots and if you are wise use this time to investigate the famous Black historians and then after Black history month go on your own exploration. This is for the rest of your life. Every year you learn something new, if not every month.

Each student presented his or her African American hero. Students in the audience were invited to raise questions, comments, or concerns about their peers’ presentation. Following each presentation, Jones supplemented students’ summarization with her own rendition of the importance of that cultural hero. Storytelling, used in this way was her attempt to minimize the superficiality

associated with Black History Month and to maximize the stories of perseverance, strength and resistance of African Americans such as Joe Louis, Madame CJ Walker, Louis Armstrong, Jessie Owens, Harriet Tubman, George Washington Carver and Martin Luther King Jr. in a way that her students would understand. Jones made sure that her students understood the contributions of African Americans who paved the way for the liberties that African Americans have today. In her storytelling there were messages of entrepreneurship, resistance, greatness, strength, power and the ability to overcome. These stories laid the groundwork for the viewing of the Amistad, the spot drawings as well as the Internet research about the Holocaust of Enslavement.

...Joe Louis

I do want to speak to you a little about Joe Louis. He was a challenge to masculinity. He was a challenge to man because at that time they had denigrated the black man, man had no brains, whereas Joe Louis became the “brown bomber”. The only thing that held Joe Louis back was his trust of his manager and businessmen who stole a fortune from him. He was not as educated in math as he needed to be. So he died poor, although he was the world champion. He was the one who challenged Hitler’s theory of the Aryan race.

...Harriet Tubman

And, Harriet Tubman was raised on the Virginia plantations down near Virginia beach and as a little girl even though she was a freed slave later. She challenged why she was not allowed to play with the other children and why she had to go and pick cotton while the other children played. She then claimed that she was going to lead her people to freedom and she took between 300 to 500 people on the underground railroad which went through Virginia beach to Canada. There is a church named after her. So I hope that in our lifetime, you will visit some of these historical places.

...Jessie Owens

At the time in the Olympics, again they were challenging all civilizations with that Aryan superiority race theory and Owens in winning four Olympic awards in four different areas proved that that theory was not true, not valid. And, later on when we look at Jacob Lawrence, the painter you will see the tribute to Jessie Owens. Showing him running through the ropes and winning

his medallion of the Olympian. There is a strength that we had at that moment. It put the Black male back on the playing field. And if you notice, today, Australia, I don't care, Switzerland, I don't care what country you will have a black man representing and we are always in the front. Whenever we are put there we seem to excel. We are not a secret anymore.

...George Washington Carver

George Washington Carver...they say that when Carver asked his mentor professor what he should study, his professor throw peanuts at him and he took those peanuts and developed 300 various products from the peanuts and then came back and studied peanuts and all of the nutritional things. They were trying to insult his intelligence and he was humble enough and showed the true reality of the moment that they were the ones that needed him.

...Martin Luther King

Now, Martin Luther King of the many things that he did remember, he won wars and he pulled down massive walls, with words. He employed words to take words and use them to his maximum ability he won battles with words. There is a phrase from the slam poet rapper to win a war with force, weapons of mass destruction is one thing, but to win a war with words that is when you have won the war. And that is what Martin Luther King has done, won wars with words. So accolades to him.

As Jones talked, I watched as the other students in the class nodded in agreement. Her storytelling made each Black hero seem more human. This experience provided her students with a framework for beginning the Amistad project. These stories of triumph and success were themes that her students could build upon in connecting contemporary cultural heroes with those cultural heroes of the past, like Sengbe, who lived during the 1800's and who ferociously fought for their freedom.

I also saw transformations occur throughout the course of the thematic unit.

When Jones asked her class how many students had seen the movie "The Amistad," approximately half of the class had raised their hands and, among those, most students shared that they did not understand the importance. One student mentioned that he had fallen asleep during the movie. Jones stated that, "some kids had seen it, but they had not really anchored into what it means and the effects of what it means."

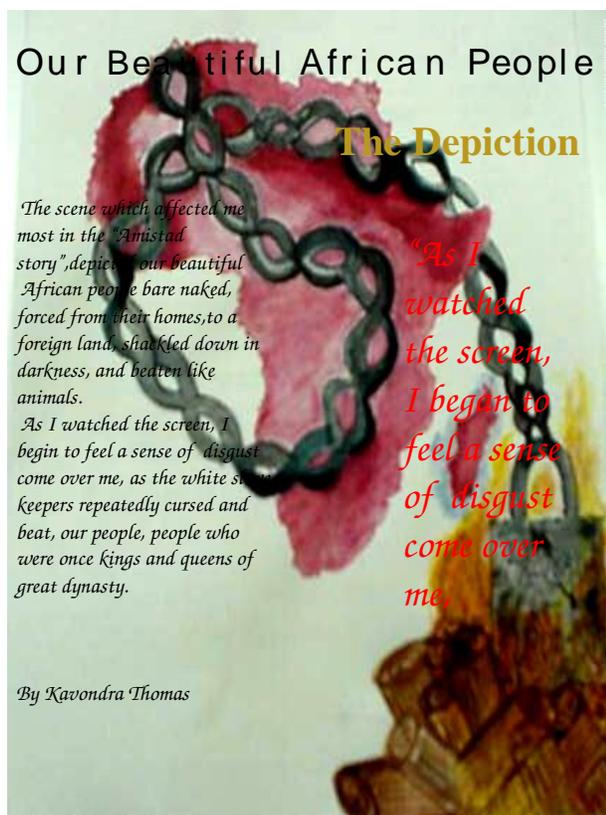
Students seemed to have few connections among their identity, their African heritage and events in the movie.

After viewing the movie “The Amistad” in class, alongside the narration, and Internet research, students identified profound images that affected them. In their work and writing they began to draw connections between events in the movie and their personal lives. I also noticed that there was a different reverence toward their African ancestors. To illustrate, several students convened to write the dedication in the book, “The Amistad.” It read:

This book is dedicated to all of our ancestors and forefathers who persevered through the dark ages of slavery. We hope this book reaches out to you in ways of encouragement... Love, Faith, Power, and Determination forever...

The dedication of this book seemed to suggest that students understood and synthesized Jones’ purpose of the Amistad unit. The dedication served as a reminder of the legacy of the Holocaust of Enslavement. In addition, the dedication demonstrated a sense of atonement and reflection on part of her students who gave homage to their Black ancestors who sacrificed and died so that future generations could be freed. Finally, the dedication presented a tribute to all of those Africans who resisted the evils of slavery and maintained their dignity despite the obstacles and challenges they faced. All of these concepts, reinforced throughout the semester, helped to affirm students’ African heritage and build self-awareness.

Each student’s spot drawings demonstrated the development of an African cultural continuity as well as the emergence of a critical consciousness. For example, this student’s spot drawing drew linkages between herself and her African ancestors.



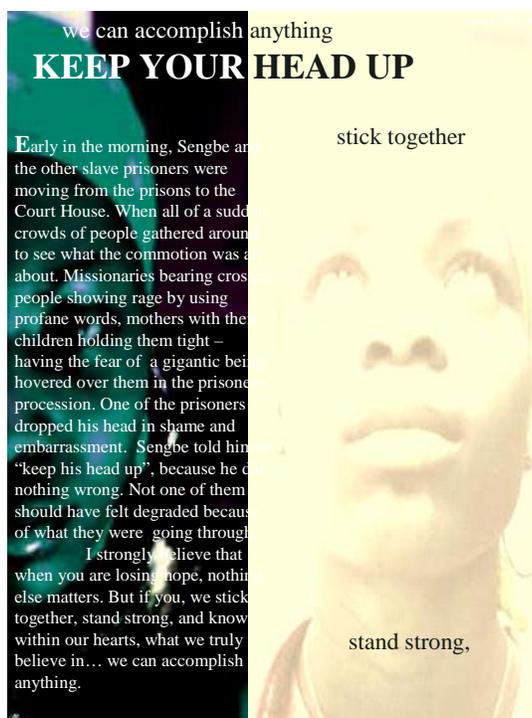
**Figure 3: Our Beautiful African People, The Depiction**

This student used images found on the Internet as well as images drawn by hand and scanned them into the computer. She used Photo Deluxe to manipulate the shackles in a way that represented the enslavement of people of African descent. The image was then transferred to PowerPoint in order for the editorial statement to be added. She called this image, "Our Beautiful African People: The Depiction" and wrote the following editorial statement:

The scene which affected me most in the "Amistad story" depicted our beautiful African people bare naked, forced from their homes, to a foreign land, shackled down in darkness, and beaten like animals. As I watched the screen, I begin to feel a sense of disgust come over me, as the white slave keepers repeatedly cursed and beat, our people, people who were once kings and queens of great dynasty.

With the use of the word “our” she built connections between herself and her African ancestors. When she wrote, “I watched and I felt a sense of disgust,” I got the sense that the images and the depictions captured in the movie had a profound effect on how she viewed the Middle Passage. For her, the events became real. She also recognized that as a result of the horrific process, enslaved Africans were forced to live in America. Finally, she highlighted that before the tragedy and in spite of the tragedy, Africans were members of a great dynasty.

In this nextspot drawing, ‘Keep Your Head Up,’ this student went on -line and located an image of African women. Then she took a digitized photo of herself looking towards the sky and placed that side-by side the African woman. The stark contrast of color and the transparent face with her eyes looking towards the sky, gives the impression that this student is building connections with her ancestor. She wrote:



**Figure 4: We can accomplish anything, Keep your head up**

Early in the morning, Sengbe and the other slave prisoners were moving from the prisons to the Court House. When all of a sudden crowds of people gathered around to see what the commotion was all about. Missionaries bearing crosses, people showing rage by using profane words, mothers with their children holding them tight – having the fear of a gigantic being hovered over them in the prisoner’s procession. One of the prisoners dropped his head in shame and embarrassment. Sengbe told him to “keep his head up,” because he did nothing wrong. Not one of them should have felt degraded because of what they were going through. I strongly believe that when you are losing hope, nothing else matters. But if you, we stick together, stand strong, and know within our hearts, what we truly believe in... we can accomplish anything.

This student was moved by Sengbe’s strength and pride when he encouraged his “brother” to keep his head up in the movie. By juxtaposing the pictures of herself and the African woman, she built connections to her cultural ancestry. When the student stated “we can accomplish anything, keep your head up, stand strong” in a sense she was saying that if her ancestors lived through the middle passage and enslavement then, collectively, her generation could move through any trial and tribulation, by keeping their heads up and standing strong. Here again we see how Jones’ student manipulated the images to create a design that links her life and her philosophy with her ancestor’s plight.

Both of these spot drawings illustrate how Jones thought deeply about the purpose of computer technology and its use as a liberating tool to help her students discover their cultural identity. Rather than using computer technology in technical ways, Jones helped her students think about the use of technology in ways that had social and/or political implications.

One final event sheds light on how Jones students transformed throughout the semester. The Amistad project culminated with a trip to the waterfront to visit the Amistad, the replica, when it docked in Roosevelt City. On this day, students were

able to explore the replica, bringing full circle their serious study of the Amistad experience and a tour of the actual ship. Here, I share students' reactions when venturing on the ship, which further demonstrates their growth throughout the project.

We arrived in Southwest at approximately 1:30 p.m. Although the sun was shining brightly, there was a slight breeze in the air. As we approached the Waterfront, a short line was forming of people waiting to view the Amistad replica. The Amistad, which had just arrived to Washington DC on March 23, would be docked at the waterfront until April 7, 2002. As we looked out onto the river, we could just barely see the flags designating the Amistad.

Mrs. Jones: I need to go find our assistant, I will be right back.

I waited patiently with 24 energetic 15-17 year old students as they playfully tagged and poked fun at each other.  
I admired their carefree attitude and their free spirits.

Tasha who was clutching a digital camera called out: Mrs. Jones wants a picture of all of us.

At first the students were reluctant to join in--however, within a few minutes 12 students had gathered around eager to be a part of this historical event.

As the students lined up, in jest, one of the students called out "GIVE US FREE" (a saying they were all familiar with since Singbe, the main character in Amistad, repeated that line throughout the movie). The students responded with laughter and the photo was shot. The photographer turned away and the huddled groups quickly disbanded to see how their picture looked in the digital camera. They knew that this picture would become a part of their digitized book on the Amistad experience.

Within a few minutes, Mrs. Jones came back to the group followed by the assistant and called her students to order. She introduced the tour guide by saying: This is Mrs. Alexander and she is going to allow four of us to go on the ship before the tour begins to allow us to take pictures of the ship." Since this was the first day that the tour was opened to the public this opportunity was significant because few residents of the DC area had set foot on the ship. In addition, this provided students with the opportunity to take shots of the ship without having to dodge the other tourists. Mrs. Jones reminded the group of four that the photo session had to be done quickly so that the rest of the tourist could have ample time to enjoy the ship.

Mrs. Jones called out: Who has the digital cameras at this point?

Four students raised their hands.

Mrs. Jones: Okay, I want you to follow Mrs. Alexander she will be taking you onto the ship. Now I would like for you to capture the experience of seeing the Amistad as if they were seeing the ship for the first time. Remember, act as though this is your first time being on the ship, capture the moment on film.”

I sensed that Mrs. Jones felt as though this experience on the boat could be a life changing experience for her students. As I followed the students on the ship, I kept in mind that these students had been preparing for this trip since the beginning of the school year; thus this venture on the boat represented a monumental occasion.

As the students approached the ship, they cautioned each other to be aware of the lighting and supported each other in handling and managing the equipment. The tour assistant called out to the students: Let's hurry up, we only have five to seven minutes before the rest of the tour begins.

The four students took their time deciding which parts of the ship to capture. Some focused on trying to capture the whole ship. Others went below deck, anxious to find connections between what they saw in the movie and learned in class and what they found on the ship. They took pictures of the picture of Singbe; of the replica of the ship and of the poster board profiles of Africans shackled together.

Mrs. Alexander asked one of the students to take a picture of the White female captain who happened to be on the ship at that time.

Lisa took the picture, quietly.

As soon as we came out Mrs. Jones asked the students how they felt. The students' comments ranged from neutral to utter disgust.

Student: It was okay

Student: It was not what I was expecting

Student: I am not going back on that ship, it was very disappointing.

Mrs. Jones asked me how I felt...

I really did not know how to respond because, in essence, I felt nothing. No anger, no remorse, no excitement, and no feelings of rage--nothing. I led myself to believe that I felt nothing because I vaguely remembered the movie. However, I responded to Mrs. Jones question with a shrug.

Rona: Let me know how you felt after you have gone in—I guess I was paying so much attention to the students I did not concentrate on the overall

experience.” In retrospect, I am not sure if this response was entirely true. I did not know how to tell Mrs. Jones that the experience was meaningless and left much to be desired.

We then, as a class, began the “official” tour. We proceeded to the dock area in which a crowd of forty (including our class) began to gather. As the tour guide began his talk, Mrs. Jones’ students corrected the tour guide on his pronunciation of the name Sengbe. As the tour guide asked questions in a dialectical fashion, the class responded with many correct answers. At certain points the students challenged the guide.

Guide: How many slaves were on the Amistad.

Class: 53.

Guide: Actually, there were no slaves on the Amistad. There were 53 people on board the Amistad. But those people were not considered slaves because they were captured illegally.

Sam: Actually during the Middle Passage the Africans on the ship were considered and treated like slaves.

The tour guide quickly dismissed the group after bringing his talk to a close after approximately 2 minutes. We were then asked to board the ship 15 people at a time.

We walked through the boat in groups and walked right back off; I noticed that comments from the students were minimal. We then left the boat, we walked through a market area in which Amistad hats, pins and t-shirts were for sale and then proceeded to the area in which their class mural would be displayed.

In the tent where our book was to be displayed, Mrs. Jones called the group to gather. She appeared to be quite disgusted by the experience. She turned to me and was visibly puzzled by what she referred to me as the “commercial mockery of the Amistad.” Sensing her dismay, I stated that this makes for wonderful classroom discussion. She then said I want to ask them what they thought. She said, “class let’s gather... what did you think about this experience?”

Students echoed this complaint. Comments included:

They had wax on the floors

This is not what we learned about

Man, it was too modern...

With regard to the initial tour guide one student commented that, “ did you see how that tour guide made it seem as though this was not a slave ship. He made it sound as though the Africans were illegally stolen. They were enslaved!”

Mrs. Jones said, "I am debating whether to bring the class back here tomorrow, this is a waste of time. Also, do you think that we need to hang our work here. I do not think that our work would be appreciated here like it would in a different venue like Roosevelt Library or the Anacostia Museum."

One young man was so frustrated that he stated that he felt like cussing out the people in charge of the tour. He echoed the responses of his classmates exclaiming that this was a waste of time and that the boat was too modern.

Another young man had quite a different response. Larry: Mrs. Jones why are you so upset. I enjoyed the experience. When I asked why he said that he did not expect to see the boat looking so modern, however this was his first time on a boat and that experience made this trip special.

At this point, I spoke up and said that I too felt quite disappointed because if this had been something pertaining to the Jewish Holocaust it would have looked quite different. By this I meant that if this has been a replica of a concentration camp, the presentation would have demonstrated a sacred place of reflection and remembrance. However, in the case of the Amistad, tourists, naïve to the horrors suffered on the boat, could come to believe that the experience for Africans was one of luxury in which Africans enjoyed good food and pleasant and hospitable conditions.

Later in a private conversation with Mrs. Jones who felt that all of the serious study she had done had been in vain, I mentioned that because of the Amistad unit, these students questioned the authenticity of the Amistad exhibit and developed an understanding of African History and critical awareness. I asked her, "Isn't that what we strive for as teachers?"

Mrs. Jones replied disappointedly that her students have put in months of work creating a presentation to show at this event and they did not think that this was worthy of their work and how they saw the Amistad. However, she saw the value in their reactions. Her students developed a pride in their work and in their African culture.

The discussion ended with the class deciding that they would display their work elsewhere.

The purpose of this ngona was to demonstrate how Jones resisted dominant negative ideologies of Black culture by designing a thematic unit that underscored the stories, history and culture of African people in American. This ngona also showed how Jones strived to connect her students' lives to concrete and meaningful

experiences. In addition, it affirmed that her students learned about their culture and resisted the dominant group's attempts to diminish the monstrosities of African enslavement in America. Her students, in turn, re-presented their images in venues that would receive and acknowledge a more authentic telling of the Amistad experience. Computer technology was used in transformative and culturally-relevant ways in order to capture this Amistad experience on digital camera as part of a book that would benefit the larger Roosevelt community.

### *Summary*

Jones' curriculum and pedagogy were multilayered. Throughout the time that I observed her teaching practice, she focused on building her students' self esteem while at the same time fostering a space where they recognized their African heritage. This ngona reveals not only how her life experiences impacted her teaching practices but also how she utilized the Internet and computer related technologies to build connections to her students' African cultural consciousness, to construct a classroom community and to disseminate liberating stories about her students' impressions of the Holocaust of Enslavement.

## Chapter 6

### Kofi Jefferson

#### **“Liberation is freeing yourself and freeing your mind”**

##### *Background*

Kofi Jefferson was born December 7th, 1955 in Rock Hill, South Carolina during the Jim Crow Era. He struck me as a caring, thoughtful and sensitive Black man who dedicated his life to instilling in his Black students the importance of personal and collective liberation. For Kofi, liberation meant “dealing with and listening to any concept, not being afraid to approach any math problem or any book and of course, any race of people.” Liberation, he believed, was “freeing yourself and your mind from everything.”

At the time of the study, Baba Kofi, as he was affectionately referred to by his students, served as both principal and teacher at a private, independent school in Roosevelt City. His *ngona* (counter-story) is instructive in that it illuminates transformative uses of computer technology as a racialized teaching tool within the bounded context of an African-centered school. Computer technology was used to provide his students with primary resources written by two prominent African American leaders at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington. As a result, his Black students not only learned about the life and times of the Black men, but also about their impact on the Black community today. In what follows, I will delineate his childhood experience, experiences with re-conceptualizing his own professional development and teaching practices as it relates to the uses of computer technology and the lives and experiences of his students.

Upon reflecting on his early schooling experiences, Kofi recalled that his initial encounters with dedicated, strong, caring Black teachers who served as “other-mothers” during his early years of schooling planted a seed in him that would later become an intense love affair with reading and books. For Kofi, this seed, planted in him by his Black teachers, was life changing because reading symbolized the opening of one’s minds—exposure to knowledge and therefore, unlimited opportunity. Here I am reminded that Kofi’s teachers are situated in a long line of Black educators who viewed the ability to read as a necessary skill to bettering one’s life chances. In one account, Carl Rowan, born in the Jim Crow South of Tennessee, recalls that his teacher in spite of the “no frills, little school” demanded that her students learn to read. In his book, *Breaking Barriers*, Miss Bessie, as they called their dedicated Black teacher, reminded him constantly, “If you don’t read, you can’t write, and if you can’t write, you can stop dreaming” (As cited in David, 1992, p. 126).

Kofi considered himself fortunate to have been taught by Black teachers in the segregated deep South who believed that Black children had no choice but to use their intellectual capacity to propel them into a better quality of life. During a conversation he revealed that, “having been taught by committed Black teachers as far back as he can remember, he always had educators that have cared deeply about his education to the extent that they would visit his home and talk to his mother about his siblings and himself and their progress in school.” In fact, Kofi noted, he never saw White teachers in his school interactions until he attended high school in Roosevelt City. Important here is the kind of impact Kofi’s Black teachers left on him. On one level, his Black teachers taught Kofi the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics.

On another level, Kofi shared how his teachers taught him to value his Blackness, to hold his head high with pride and to use his intelligence to the best of his ability. Kofi's earlier experiences with Black teachers, who held high expectations for their Black students, would come to influence his choice to become a teacher and would deeply impact how he saw his role as a teacher of Black children.

### *The Evolution of Teaching Identity*

Kofi recalled several life experiences that would influence his analysis of racism, and would mold his views of teaching. These experiences inspired his desire to strive for a more authentic pedagogy for Black youth. As a child, Kofi observed discord and separation amongst the Black and White races living in Rock Hill. Even more disturbing, he noticed how Black elders whom he highly respected, became quiet and passive in the presence of white men and women. He shared:

I noticed it back in South Carolina as a little boy. I was working at a grocery store and the grocery store was situated in a Black neighborhood. On the other side of the train tracks was a white neighborhood. Whenever they [white people] would come across the track to the store, everything would just get quiet and change. People would stop their conversations and they [white people] looked very poor, they were dirty, but we still had to stop what we were doing. So I started noticing the distinctions between the two worlds and as I got older I guess I paid closer attention to the racial dynamic.

At a very young age, Kofi took notice of the ill-fated relations and negative attitudes between members of the Black community and white community in his hometown. These observations became etched in Kofi's mind. The playwright, fiction writer and journalist, Richard Wright at the age of nine also attempted to make sense of his observations of race relations in the Deep South. He recalled, "...I noticed that there

were two lines of people at the ticket window, a “white line and a black line. During my visit at Granny’s, a sense of the two races had been born in me with a sharp concreteness that would never die until I died (David, 1968, p.10).” Deeply affected by this event, Kofi, as a young boy could not understand the separation and change in demeanor of the Black community that occurred when white people especially those of lesser social class were present. It was at this point that he would ask himself, “what happened to us? Where do we fit into the larger scheme of this?” Although he didn’t know it at the time, this question that developed at the age of seven would become a quest to understand why many members of the Black community were treated in a dehumanizing fashion.

Another life experience that would deeply impact his view of teaching occurred at the age of seven in his move to the North. Kofi’s family migrated to and settled in Roosevelt City in the 1950’s and he matriculated through the Roosevelt Public School. Upon graduating from Kennedy High School, he decided to major in history at St. Augustine College, a historically Black College located in Raleigh, North Carolina. In the following passage, he shared his reasons for majoring in history.

I wanted to know what [was] going on—how Black people came to be in the predicament that they were in. I needed to have some answers and I think that that particular discipline was the area that helped me in answering some of my questions and plus I made A’s in it. I loved reading. I loved doing papers and I loved research. So I had a natural propensity to move in that direction.

By becoming a history major, he found success. This discipline allowed him to indulge in his favorite pastime- reading and to pursue the questions regarding race that plagued him since childhood.

Kofi attended St. Augustine College for two years and then decided to take a leave of absence. He moved back to Roosevelt City and was hired as a newsroom “copy boy” cutting wires and taking news bites to the foreign desk, the national desk and the city desk in Roosevelt City. He recalled:

The beautiful thing is that [I was] allowed the opportunity to read everything from around the world; stories from South Africa, Australia, and I started reading that stuff because that was what other people around me were doing reading everything and I developed a thirst like that.

Exposure to international news, thoughts, ideas and communities opened his eyes to larger worldwide issues and broadened his understanding of international concepts.

That is why when Kofi’s sibling, Michael, who was living in Nigeria, announced that he was getting married, Kofi headed to Africa for two weeks. This trip had a life changing effect. Kofi was amazed by the leadership roles held by African men and the roles women assume. For the first time, he witnessed “Black folks running everything...“pilots, postal workers, everything... it was really a culture shock.”

Two weeks became a month and when he returned to the U.S., he quit his job as a copy boy at the newspaper and decided that it was his calling to teach Black children. As he remembers, as a result of the trip, he became eager to get his degree; seeing Nigerians in positions of power became an impetus for him to go back to college.

Kofi recalled that as a child and young adult growing up in the U.S. he rarely saw Black people “running things.” After his visit, he recognized that he had control over his destiny as did his African brothers and sisters. More importantly, he wanted to foster environments where Black youth recognized and claimed their ability to tap into their full potential despite the challenges of racism and sexism pervasive in the

US. Teaching, therefore, became his immediate goal. Thus, when Kofi returned to the states, he enrolled in a teaching program at University of Roosevelt City.

### *The Merging of Identity and Teaching*

#### Recognizing Cultural Irrelevancy in Teacher Education

While attending a teacher education certification program at the University of Roosevelt, Kofi recognized the incongruity between what he was learning and its relevance to Black children. He expressed that:

[The assignments included] a lot of reading which I was more than prepared for being the Black male that I was, I read everything that they put into my face. [I would hear] God, Jefferson, you are reading everything and some more. So my teachers were very impressed with that and it gave me the chance to do some serious research on education. I came up with and scrutinized the different theories of Piaget; I didn't know too much about African culture at the time and at that time I didn't know too much about Khemet, Carnet and all of that. I wasn't familiar with all of that, just consumed with the European theories of education, I could feel it at the time that there was something wrong with these theories but was not in the position to debate them because in order to debate them you need something to neutralize it with. I was not prepared to do that I was not armed; that would come later in my life through self study. The University did not prepare me [to teach Black children].

In this passage, it seems as though Kofi, who experienced caring, dedicated Black teachers throughout his schooling experiences, found it difficult to connect his own experiences with the material disseminated in his courses. Here, I am reminded of my own experiences in education courses in trying to figure out where my “Blackness” fit. Kofi desired to not only debunk the racist doctrine predicated on cultural deficit theory pervasive in teacher education programs in the early 1970's, but also to seek out theories that gave credence to alternative interpretations of teaching all children and more specifically Black children.

The recognition that something was missing in the educational literature and in teacher educational theory is not unusual. Many scholars and educators of color have questioned why educational researchers assumed that Black children have no culture distinct from their White counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 1994, Hilliard, 1997, Harry, 2002). As a result of this misconception, the curriculum, pedagogical styles and parental support strategies advocated by many teacher education programs, in many cases, reflects the culture of white children and fails to recognize cultural difference. Kofi, who was deeply concerned with the education of Black children, seemed to perceive himself as alone in questioning traditional assumptions and seeking out more culturally-relevant theories to utilize toward the education of Black students. Kofi sought out alternative sites and literature to find the resources he needed to interrupt one way of knowing, being, and teaching as it relates to Black children and methods of instruction. He accidentally stumbled upon an African-centered school. He still remembers his first encounter with Sankofa Independent School (SIS), an African-centered school located in the Northern section of Roosevelt City.

I was getting my certification from UR and I would catch the bus out in the front of the school and I would see the children playing in the yard. There is a bus stop right out here so I would catch the bus to school. And I walked up to the owner of the school and I said, "I want to work here one day" and I don't know what made me say that. Maybe some vibe I felt walking past the school that day. Little did I know that I would be the [teacher, and then] principal of the school one day.

However, the young ambitious pre-service teacher's next few years did not lead to SIS. After acquiring an education degree from the University of Roosevelt, Kofi landed his first teaching job at his alma mater, Kennedy High School, as a twelfth

grade history teacher. Situated in the northern section of Roosevelt City the student population consisted of predominately working class African American students. Low academic achievement among students and low expectations of both students and the predominately African American staff emanated throughout the high school making the position ill-fated for Kofi.

While teaching at Kennedy High School, Kofi spent much of his time alone tapping into African-centered literature and attending talks given by scholars such as John Henrik Clarke, Yosef ben-Jochannen, Asa Hilliard and Frances Welsing. In a sense, this scholarly hiatus enabled Kofi to develop a stronger sense of his cultural self as well as a starting point for understanding of African contributions to the world. As he became more aware of his African cultural heritage, he became more disenchanted with his experiences at Kennedy. He remembered:

I couldn't make an impact. The 12th graders were functionally illiterate. The principal did not care. He made a statement to me that my job was to get these children in at 9 and out by 3. It just didn't sit that well with me and sitting in the teacher's lounge with some of those veteran teachers and the comments that they would make about children it would be depressing coming out of that teacher's lounge. You know that all of the teacher's get an hour break and they flock to the teacher's lounge and they drink coffee and they smoke cigarettes and the things that I would hear about some of the children that they would work with everyday whooo I would leave that joint man...it makes you want to go Whoof! I sort of got tired of being around that kind of vibe, because it is not good being around... you know.... So I left...by then I had tapped into African culture.

As Kofi developed as a scholar of African-centered thought and practice, he became disturbed with his experiences working at Kennedy High School. Kofi recognized that he could reach and affect more Black children by working in public schools. However, after only three short years, Kofi found that the institutional constraints and

on-going politics did more to reproduce and perpetuate racialized roles for his Black students. Kofi, as part of that system, in a sense, did not want to participate. As a result, he chose to “find something better than Kennedy High School.” In this case, “better” symbolized an educational environment that promoted Black liberatory practices for the African community in general, and Black youth in particular. Therefore, he pursued a career within an independent Black school.

Kofi’s choice to pursue a career in independent Black schools occurred as a measure of ongoing disappointment with the American public school system, which he came to understand as being based on a culture that reflected the dominant group’s racist ideology. It was also a measure of his internalized desire for racial uplift and self empowerment for African people. Thus, his choice to continue the legacy of his Black fore-teachers by seeking out alternative institutions with politically conscious African American students and teachers came as no surprise to family and friends. In January of 1985, Kofi began teaching 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade at Sankofa Independent School (SIS).

SIS, founded in 1977, emerged out of a working-class, politically-conscious Black parents’ community desire to have child-care. A member of the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI), SIS has distinguished itself as a “non-public, precollegiate, self-governing institution that is not financially dependent upon a larger public or sectarian organization” (Jones, 1992, p. 85).” The mission of SIS, as well as other CIBI schools, is to “tackle, absorb, decipher, reject, appreciate European American culture in all its racism, complexity, liberation, and ideas and models

(Madhubuti, 1994 p.8).” To this end, culture, as a process, served as a tool for educating African American children.

Modeled much like other African-centered schools, SIS is an open-spaced facility that groups students in a multi-aged fashion. The desire is for students to “develop naturally as siblings do in a family—the younger students learning skills faster [since they are working with more advanced students] and older students acquiring a sense of responsibility and maturity along with advanced academic skills (post-interview date).” The curriculum is varied with course offerings such as language arts, math, Spanish, French, Kiswahili, sewing, cooking, computer literacy, typing, social studies, woodworking, science, art, music and physical education. This multi-disciplinary, multi-age approach offered a sound environment where Kofi could build his understanding of best teaching practices for Black youth while at the same time live out his commitment to the liberation of the Black community in America and around the Diaspora.

By the following September, Kofi settled into a position as one of two middle school teachers at SIS. Finally, he had found a community that held high expectations for Black children as well as a group of teachers and staff that shared a like-minded philosophy about Black liberation. Professional development took on different meanings within this context since it spoke directly to the needs of Black children. For example, shortly after becoming a part of the staff the SIS co-founder and principal, Mama Nzinga sent the faculty to Kent State University for one month

to study African-centered methodology and pedagogy with Kofi Lomotey.<sup>15</sup> During these workshops, teachers were taught how to develop lesson plans in which “Black students see themselves in the lesson.” They further learned how meanings are conveyed through physical nuance, voice patterns and tone, hair style, dress and character. In addition, Lomotey instructed teachers on the importance of verbal and non-verbal communication reflecting knowledge and foundation in African-centered philosophy. To illustrate a sample lesson, Kofi explained how a teacher at SIS would teach about the contributions of Lewis Latimer<sup>16</sup> who invented the light filament. He shared:

[Let’s study] both of them and we want to make an honest contribution [to scientific development]. [Thomas] Edison developed the light bulb, let’s give him credit for that. The light bulb would not stay on; it kept going out so here comes this gentleman to put in the filament. So the students will get a chance to process both sides of this. Lewis Latimer received a patent to light up the city of New York. He also received a patent to light up the city of London. Him and Edison went to court he kicked Edison’s butt in the court room because Edison was stealing from him. It is important that students know both sides of the facts. And then they can synthesize both of these and then make a decision. That is what I mean by seeing themselves in a truthful way. Not just a picture, it is much deeper than that.

For Kofi, teaching in this way was beyond simply adding a “black fact” or a biography of a famous Black American to the curriculum. According to Kofi, African-centered teachers took their students on a journey, in a sense, to engage in a cultural rediscovery process of seeking out more authentic interpretations of historical events. This is important because in mainstream “official curriculum” the voices of Blacks are often marginalized or eliminated from the educational process (Ladson-

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<sup>15</sup> Kofi Lomotey is a president of Fort Valley State University and serves as national secretary/treasurer for The Council of Independent Black Institutions. He is nationally recognized as a leader in African-centered education and professional development.

Billings, 1994; Nieto, 1996). Here, Kofi attempted to reconstruct the past by including the “honest” contributions of Blacks historically and currently negated from mainstream conversations. In this way, it seemed that Kofi wanted his students to critically understand that there is not just one “T”ruth—but, multiple cultural realities depending on one’s perspective.

Kofi’s goal of a more authentic teaching practice for Black children came to fruition after years of personal study and after his professional development experiences as Kent State University. The commitment to honesty, the sharing of multiple perspectives, the building of a Black consciousness as well as the deprogramming of black children of the effects of White supremacy became the building blocks of Kofi’s pedagogy.

As evidenced by the aforementioned example, Kofi firmly utilized his pedagogy as a tool to work towards the end goal of the liberation of his Black students’ minds. Liberation, Kofi stated, happens in stages. Initially, students must come out of the box and develop a paradigm in which they see the world anew. According to Kofi, students must be willing to “deal and listen to any concept, not be afraid to approach any math problem or any book and, of course, any race of people. Liberation is freeing yourself and your mind from everything.” To this end, liberation is freedom of one’s community and eventually freedom for all. At the base of his pedagogical philosophy were two important principals: collective savvy (i.e. African-centered values, family, knowledge and understanding) and safety (i.e. labeling, high expectations). Threaded throughout both of these concepts was the building of a Black consciousness.

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis Latimer developed and patented the process for manufacturing the carbon filament.

### Collective Savvy

Over the course of numerous observations of Kofi's classroom practice, I continuously heard him say "collective savvy." Upon further observation, I noticed the word "SAVVY" cut from a magazine and posted on a supply closet by the first main table; the large cut-out of the word. "SAVVY" was surrounded by pictures of students both former and current. During an informal interview, he explained:

Collective Savvy is knowledge and understanding. So we say to each other, do we want to be SAVVY? And they say, yes, Collective Savvy! We all want to do that. I just remind them of that all of the time. I just say savvy and they automatically say, collective savvy. So it's just keeping them conscious of that unity that we are all one and that we are all in this together. And that is important in this setting.

Collective savvy referred to two main concepts essential to Kofi's pedagogy; communal knowledge and understanding. Fundamental to African-centered philosophy is the concept of community or as it is often referred to, nationbuilding. This concept relies on the fact that African Americans must depend on themselves to improve their life chances. As such, Kofi's pedagogy disrupted traditional notions of competition and "survival of the fittest" often exhibited in public schools, by deeply understanding that all children must work together toward collective empowerment. This principle was supported by the multi-aged, inclusive classroom environment where the mantra is "if one does not succeed, no one succeeds." Kofi commented:

It works out fine... [the co-founder] likes to look at that [the classroom environment] like it's a family sitting at dinner table. You can't tell the younger one "you can't eat with us right now, you are too young. Everyone comes to the table and so they support each other. The eighth graders support the fifth graders and the fifth graders support the eighth graders you know...The fifth graders are going to be where the eighth graders are right

now. And you can go ahead and have them start to work with that and it works out pretty well.

In this African-centered context, knowledge and understanding transcended traditional notions of “textbook or standardized test” knowledge to mirror the notion that one must understand the past in order to comprehend the present and future. Thus, the holistic curriculum is reflective of an African-ethos and the child’s socialization (i.e. social practices, images, languages, pledges). The curriculum that Kofi designed countered the negative images projected by television, the media, and materials valued by the dominant culture. He attempted to develop in his students a sense of collective purpose, direction, positive identity and a hunger for knowledge. The motto was “exposure is the key to success.” In what follows, I illustrate how Kofi interrupted taken for granted ways of knowing and being by reinforcing a sense of Black self through identification with the past. Kofi demonstrated his pedagogical philosophy while sharing an incident that occurred during a field trip to Mt. Vernon, Virginia.

I took a group of children to Mt. Vernon. Everybody that comes to Mt. Vernon, receives carnations to put on George and Martha’s grave. Everyone lines up. We were the only Black school out there that day, my 20 children with all of these other white schools. I am standing in line to put carnations on George and Martha’s grave and something says to me, “Kofi you can’t allow these children to honor George and Martha with these carnations; you’ve got to get them out of this line and allow them to make it down to the “slave quarters.” But I had to do it the right way because there is a lot of security out there. So, I went up to one of the security guards because I know that I am behind enemy lines. So here I am, I get humble, “Excuse me...Sir, is it possible for me and my group to take our carnations down to the “slave quarters?” They turned beet red...who did this man think he is. They said GO AHEAD (gruffly). So, I told my students, “HEY, let’s go!” We got out of that line so quick and we went down to the “slave quarters” or what they call the “slave quarters” I don’t use that language...so we put our carnations down there, we did the African pledge:

“We are African people,  
struggling for nationalism and human rights...”

And guess what, I didn't even have to tell them, they picked up some soil and rocks and they brought them back to school and kept them because they said Kofi, we were on sacred ground. (September 6, 2003)

To begin, Kofi demonstrated three important aspects of his teaching philosophy throughout the course of this vignette. First, he is led by his inner voice, not by what society mandates as “normal and appropriate protocol.” He said, “something says to me, “Kofi you can't allow these children to honor George and Martha with these carnations.” Thus, his intuition as well as the knowledge of himself, guided him in teaching his students not only about themselves, but also how to respond to the arrangements and practices of the dominant culture's institutions failure to recognize, support or respect the history and culture of diverse populations in the U.S. Therefore, students learned through his modeling how to combat mainstream ways of knowing and being by watching how their teacher navigated mainstream practices.

Second, Kofi, in his actions, supported the African-centered discourse grounded in his classroom by showing that community transcends the immediate, living and physical to include the spiritual world of the ancestors. Thus, acknowledging and paying homage to the ancestors illustrated collective savvy, since it reinforced the notion that one must pay respect to those who came before and leave something for those yet to come. In this case, Kofi created the space for students to recognize that they would not be present had it not been for the sacrifices of enslaved African family members.

Finally, in his use of language, Kofi refused to reify the enslaved African as a slave. Kofi distinguished between the employees of Mt. Vernon and their use of “slave” and the language he used to refer to his enslaved ancestors. Slave denotes that Africans accepted their position as objectified property of Europeans as opposed to enslaved Africans, which symbolizes a position in which they were in bondage, but not property. Again, in Kofi’s language he constantly modeled the humanizing of Black folks. To this end, this vignette, demonstrated how Kofi and his students, collectively challenged institutionalized racist practices, in turn, freeing themselves by demanding a more authentic and realistic experience on their visitation to Mt. Vernon.

### Safety

As mentioned earlier, creating an environment where his students felt safe was of major concern to Kofi. Along with this dimension of safety, themes of high expectation and care, seen commonly in the literature on culturally-relevant teaching, were also evidenced throughout my observations of Kofi. During an informal conversation, we discussed his views on safety:

K: I need for everyone to feel safe...

R: Right and I’ve noticed that you say that quite often

K: Five things that the brain needs. The first thing that the brain needs is safety-it needs to feel safe because when children are nervous and uptight, or adults or anyone else for that matter the brain shuts down and that is what happens to students in the regular classroom, students are picked on and they, they turn off. And I don’t want them to feel like that because [the brain] needs safety, it needs nourishment, social activities that they are involved in, it needs emotion and it needs to process information. Those are the five needs of the brain. If it does not have safety, then all of that other stuff is out.

R: Absolutely, so based on what you are saying, if children feel safe then they automatically let their guard down.

K:...and to relax and make a mistake and it is okay. In this [mainstream] community, everyone has to be perfect. You don't have to be perfect [in the SIS community]; it is a learning process. We are going to make mistakes through this process and I want them to realize that early on. They may say, I am scared to raise my hand, I may make a mistake. I don't want them to feel like that.

As evidenced, safety as a form of care takes on new meanings in this classroom; Kofi fostered an environment where his students were not only physically safe, but also mentally, spiritually, and psychologically safe. In essence, he taught to the whole child. Therefore, each student was encouraged to make his or her own special contribution to the classroom. For example, learning differences, in the classroom, were not looked upon as deficits; rather these differences were respected and added to the diversity within the class. Kofi shared that he was disheartened by the fact that many schools label children with learning differences, especially Black boys. He said that, "we [should] respect how the brain is processing then we deal with that. But to the educational establishment, whatever does not fit inside that box right is a problem." Therefore, in attempting to create a safe and nurturing environment for his students, he rejected labels and embraced the varied talents that his students exhibit, in turn, creating a risk-free environment.

*Perspectives on the Internet and Computer-Related Technologies*

In all that Kofi did, he strived to foster an educational environment where he re-presented and validated his students' cultural history and identity by immersing them in their African/African American history and culture. Important to Kofi's own identity, as an African American teacher, was identifying with the past in the form of understanding the traditions, experiences and lives of his African American ancestors. In the same vein, he encouraged his students to understand concepts like 'nationbuilding', 'institution building'; thus, these ideas became a seamless part of his classroom practice. According to Akoto (1992), to engage in 'nationbuilding' means to work to counteract generations of miseducation and the consequent psychic dependency, defeatism, self-hatred, misguided loyalties, and inferiority complexes of Black people. In addition, Kofi taught in ways that countered "official school knowledge" and ideology by designing curricular structures that made explicit racism and racist notions. By doing this, he offered his students various ways of thinking about liberation within differing contexts.

Like Jones, Kofi used the Internet as a counter hegemonic tool to provide his students with exposure to African ways of knowing and being via imaging, primary documents and literature presented on the Internet. This way of using the computer technology was congruent with Kofi's teaching philosophy. The motto in his classroom was "exposure is the key to success." In speaking with Kofi over time, I learned that he was excited about the possibilities that computer technology brings. He shared, "with a book we have to create our own images in our heads. When I read Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* years ago, I had to visualize images in my

head as I read. With the [computer the] children are able to see that images [of Booker T. Washington] in real time. So that is it. It is fascinating what technology can offer, if used properly.” By real time, he was referring to the immediacy of seeing images, hearing actual speeches, linking to relevant resources and being a part of the atmosphere of the time period within a matter of seconds. Kofi argued that this makes the Internet one of the most powerful educational tools. He added:

I think that we should use everything at our disposal to achieve our liberation. If it means mastering the computer, whatever it takes for us to get on par with the rest of the world we need to use it. If we don't tap into this technology we are not going to ever catch up. The world is moving at such a rapid rate right now you are not going to be able to do anything unless you tap into this technology. And I understand spirit world and I understand all of that—there is a place for all of that... don't get me wrong but technology is a tool. Are you going to have a house and not have a pair of pliers or a screwdriver in the house?

Here, Kofi metaphorically pointed out that much like a screwdriver or a pair of pliers was essential tools to a household, he saw computer technology as an essential tool in the schooling process of all students and specifically Black students. In order for Black students to compete in today's society, they must develop a certain level of technological prowess.

He continued to add,

So that is where I am with this technology thing. And I think that our children should be on par with Chinese students, Japanese students, European students etc. They are mastering the technology and we are going to do it too.

By making his students technologically savvy, some members of the Black community become more technologically aware. For Kofi, his students must “master” the use of computer technology since it represents one of many essential components necessary to compete with other racial groups. In a sense he was

purposeful about the ways that computer technologies should be used. His Black students must not only know how to use computer technology in ways that lead to the building of self-knowledge and consciousness, but also his students must become the creators, designers and constructors of computers and related software in order to compete with other racial groups. In doing this, his students would become the producers of knowledge about computer as opposed to the consumers.

Kofi not only viewed the computer as a critical educational tool, but also saw computer technology as a necessary vehicle for Black liberation. This perspective differs from some of the teachers who are members of the Council for Independent Black schools (CIBI). Although many members of CIBI agree with Kofi's view, at this juncture, members of CIBI have not reached a consensus about the role of computer technology in African-centered education. In essence, their central goal is to allow for the spectrum of differences within their like-minded tradition of African-centered education. The perspective on computer technology varies within the organization. Some do not believe in utilizing the Internet as a tool for liberation because "the revolution should not be publicized" and the Internet exists within a public domain that is not secured. Others have a distrust of westernized technologies, while others use computer technology for basic research within schooling institutions. Kofi represented one of the few members of CIBI who viewed technology as a necessary vehicle for liberation of the African mind as well as a critical tool for nation building.

*The Thematic Unit: The Dramatization of Booker T. Washington and Dubois debate  
Using the Internet*

Description

In this thematic unit, the Internet was used to expose students to a multitude of resources about Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Dubois and the historical context at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the computer technology, in the form of the Internet, was used to expose students to specific websites, it played a significant role in the development of student thinking as it related to the objectives of the thematic unit.

In the following pages, I present Kofi's teaching philosophy. Next, I will delineate the thematic unit. I will close by discussing transformations I observed in Kofi's classroom over the course of a two-week thematic unit. During that time, I focused on how he infused the use of computer technology and the Internet as a "transformative" teaching tool in his social studies thematic unit. For Kofi, "transformative" meant the way that he used computer technology to allow the voices and images of powerful Black leaders to be illuminated in the "official" school curriculum. Although, subtle in its use, the computer technology informed how his students came to understand important ideas in this debate as well as their own personal responsibilities as the emerging generation of Black leaders.

The thematic unit consisted of three consecutive activities: a reading from a chapter entitled, "African American Leaders Speak Out" from Molefi Asante's text, an Internet search, a mind mapping activity also referred to as cognitive mapping. In its design, the thematic unit helped students to conceptualize and understand the basic tenets of the debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois. Throughout

the thematic unit, Kofi invited his students to engage in activities that focused on the historical context, the major thinkers, and the main arguments during that time period. These activities led to the final dramatization, which consisted of a debate between the two eighth grade classes in which students represented the side of either Washington or Dubois. During the debate, students argued for the best way to educate Black people during reconstruction.

When asked what he wanted his students to learn from this thematic unit, Kofi responded,

I want them to learn about this particular historical period. I want them to learn how to work as a team...and, this is important, because the job market these days are looking for teams. That person working at the corporation with the one brain, they are not looking for that anymore. They are looking for a whole body of people who can work and solve problems. So I am hoping to achieve that at the end of the chapter that team effort of solving problems. And, I want my students to work with the Internet.

At first glance, this seems like a typical teacher's commentary. Kofi desired for his students to understand the historical context at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There was a focus on preparing students for the workforce, and a concentration on teamwork and collaboration. However, Kofi's point of departure for embarking on this thematic unit was to advance Pan Africanism; in other words, students are taught that they are African and that their purpose is to make "Africa" better (Nkrumah, 1960; Lomotey, 1978). His epistemological consciousness was informed and guided by Africentric ways of knowing and being. Molefi Asante (1998) describes Africentricity is the ... "total use of method to effect the psychological, cultural, and economic conditions of the Black community" (p.4).

In what follows, I describe the different dimensions of the thematic unit demonstrating how Kofi, in his pedagogy, builds on Africentric conceptions of community which stresses connections, care, and personal accountability (Asante, 1987; Shockley, 2003.) In addition, I will discuss how he attempts to build connections between Africa and the Diaspora and encouraged critical thought by utilizing computer technology.

As mentioned previously, Kofi's history class comprised fifth through eighth grade students. Students were multi-age and multi-levels. On the day that the thematic unit began, Kofi team-taught his class with Brother Agyei, the other 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. The class consisted of twenty-eight middle school students. My field notes describe what I saw on the first day of the thematic unit.

I arrived at school around 9:00 to find students seated in a large circle. I am still blown away by the atmosphere that was created in this room. This room celebrates the African American experience and is so unlike many classrooms that I have visited throughout my years of teaching in public schools. The tables had been moved out of the way to make room for the circle. There was a sense of anticipation and excitement. Students sat expectantly in their seats prepared with their history textbook in hand. The history book was entitled, *African American History, A Journey of Liberation*. If students did not have their books they shared with their classmates. I only counted two students who did not have their books. Teachers were at either end of the circle.

Here, I was struck by the students' familiarity with the routine and the peaceful atmosphere. Normally, students sat grouped around four large tables. However, the transition to a larger circle that included both junior high school classes was seamless. Watching the students move into groups reminded me of Kofi's end goal of "collective savvy" –all students working together for collective empowerment. In this environment, I felt safe. As part of the classroom community, the students went

out of their way to make sure that I, in addition to their classmates, was comfortable and that they had the necessary materials.

The chapter entitled, *African American Leaders Speak Out*, focused on African American leaders at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the most notable were Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois. In short, the chapter covered the life, time and thoughts of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois. Also highlighted were William Trotter, who viewed Washington as a danger to African American people, Ida B. Wells, a crusader against lynching and Carter G. Woodson who argued that a Eurocentric method of education would create a Black race of people who would accept the idea of European superiority and African American inferiority.

Kofi used a number of pedagogical strategies to help his students develop the critical thinking skills needed for the culminating debate. Among those strategies that Kofi used were: an ongoing focus on interpretation of text; the encouragement of critical thought; and, the application of text to real life events. For example, in the following conversation, Kofi begins the lesson by probing his students understanding of an African proverb.

Brother K: Wait a minute brother—what about all of this stuff at the beginning of the chapter.

Jamel reads...

Brother K: Now what you see at the top is simply an outline and you should pay really close attention. You with us Tagi? OK brother go ahead—Voices for Change. Student reads...The Kenyans of Africa have a proverb: “When the elephants fight, only the grass suffers.”

Brother K: Does someone want to interpret that proverb? When elephants fight only the grass suffers? Yes, Hakiem?

Alesia: When the leader fights, his army dies.

Brother K: Not quite, anyone else? Anyone else want to try that?

Kwabena: When the two important figures fight, then the people under them suffer?

Brother K: You are very close; say that again so that everyone can hear you. Did you hear that Tagi?

Kwabena: When two people fight, then all of the people that are under him suffer.

Brother K: Excellent interpretation. Excellent interpretation.

Kofi, in this dialogue, invited his students to analyze the proverb, in a sense allowing his students entrée into African ways of knowing and being since African conceptualizations and philosophies are captured by proverbs. As a result, his students, in conscious and unconscious ways, were able to reattach to their cultural center (i.e. traditional African philosophy). By focusing on this proverb, Kofi purposefully provided his students with a way of understanding the importance of protecting and honoring the community.

Kofi then tied this proverb back to the purpose of the text by concentrating on the important leaders who were the focus of the text. In examining the content of the proverb, Kofi brought home the importance of leadership building connections between the past and the present.

Kofi: Who are the two important people that are talked about?

Students (call and response manner): Booker T Washington and W.E.B. Dubois.

Kofi: This is going to be a serious, serious debate between these two gentlemen and that debate continues to be waged today, believe it or not. It showed up again with Minister Farrakhan and Jessie Jackson—it showed up again with Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. Not necessarily with education, but political aspects so that is still with us to this very day. So it is important that you look at both sides and from my studies and from my observations I came to the conclusion that both of them, not just one at the expense of the other. So let's pay very close attention to what these two gentlemen had to say about education. Very good interpretation!

By urging his students to look at both sides, it is clear, from the preceding interaction that Kofi underscored the importance of multiple perspectives. In other words, there were no absolute truth claims, only varying standpoints or realities that constitute partial truths. Kofi saw it as his responsibility to make sure that his students received sufficient information so that they may come to their own understandings of ideas at play. On the other hand, Kofi avoided building either/or dichotomous relationship of Eurocentric masculine thought (Hill-Collins, 1990) by encouraging his students to understand the context, background and arguments of the players. To this end, Kofi asserted his personal truth by emphasizing that although there have always been differences among leaders in the African community, there was something to be learned from both perspectives.

Later in the discussion he added:

Kofi: There will be another argument later down the road between MLK in the South and Malcolm X in the North. Martin Luther King Jr. was for what--

Student (call and response manner): Non-violence

Kofi: Malcolm said "I am not turning no cheek". If someone hits me on the cheek, send them to the graveyard. Different philosophy. So we see this played out over and over. Jackson, Rainbow coalition, Min. Farrakhan. Played out...Who will be the next two. How will the next drama be played out? Yeah we do, it may be someone in this circle. It may be someone in this circle.

This interaction was about building linkages between cultural heroes of the past and his students' everyday experiences and responsibilities. Kofi began with Washington and Dubois and named cultural heroes in following generations until he posed the question "Who will be the next two?" In doing this, Kofi made a seamless connection between African Americans, past and present. In addition, he encouraged

his students by providing a space where students could see themselves as agents of social change and personally responsible for carrying on the mission of collective liberation for Blacks in Africa and the Diaspora. In this classroom, Kofi fostered a space where students saw clear linkages between themselves, their ancestors and contemporary scholars and leaders.

Transformative Pedagogy using the Internet and Computer-related Technologies  
*Dialogue and consciousness-raising*

Dialogue was a critical element of Kofi's epistemological approach to teaching. To contextualize the use of computer technology, Kofi spent the first third of the thematic unit dialoguing, in the form of storytelling, as a way to introduce important concepts relevant to the historical time period. Students took turns reading passages from the chapter while Kofi interjecting intermittently to ask a question or to tell a story. Storytelling, in this case, was used to introduce his students to life lessons. Recapturing historical events and experiences that have been lost in the Black community became the reason for his storytelling. Dialogue used in this way allowed Kofi to speak from his own standpoint, in turn, allowing students to contribute their own partial perspectives thus creating a social condition where all parties are heard (Hill-Collins, 1990).

Dialogue also took the form of "call and response." As Collins brings forth this is a type of call and response tradition whereby the power dynamics are fluid, everyone has a voice, but everyone must listen and respond to other voices in order to be allowed to remain in the community (p. 237). Kofi would pose a question and ask students to collectively respond. All the time, Kofi continued to push his student to

build connections to the past in order to understand the present and future while simultaneously encouraging his Black students to apply historical concepts to their daily lives. In the following passage, I will demonstrate how Kofi interspersed the reading activity with ongoing dialogue. In particular, Kofi both preached and told personal stories to contextualize the events presented in the text. For example, Kofi shared his thoughts about the impact of Washington's book, *Up from Slavery* in his own life.

Brother K: When you all get some time, please read *Up From Slavery*. I read it when I was in eleventh grade in high school; the book really blew my mind. It made me want to study more, it made me want to read more, it made me a much more serious individual in school. You should read this book. How this man taught himself, working at night, trying to go to school during the day. Brilliant piece of work, check it out. Alright, brother go ahead, you are doing a good job.

I also found that Kofi personalized his instruction in ways that built connections between what his students knew and what they were learning in the text through storytelling. For example, Kofi would have ongoing one-on-one conversations with his students about how the text and discussion related directly to his students personal and cultural experiences. Throughout this section of the chapter, Kofi told a story about George Washington Carver.

Brother K: Probably one of the most brilliant scientists that this country has ever seen and one day this man is really going to be honored even more so than what he has been. Brilliant scientist not just with peanuts, he was an artist, all of these things, he was a painter, he made his own paint, he created the greens and purples. Ayanna (he directs his question to one of his female students), you remember you read that chapter on the secret life of plants by the way I still have your book in the closet. And he had this spiritual connection with these plants. I hope that you have been reading the unit on plants, that you have grown to appreciate this life form around us. It is the only thing on this planet that is not a parasite—everything else is parasites.

We live off of something else they don't. Every time I see someone cutting down a tree, I can feel it. I don't know about you, because every time a tree is missing you are losing out on a little bit of what...?

Students (call and response manner):-Oxygen!

Brother K: We need it. Go ahead brother finish up and then I will call on someone else.

He also wanted his students to understand the importance of documenting and referencing. As the following passage suggests, he pushed his students to think about who wrote the research and for what purpose? To illustrate, in the following passage, Kofi turned his students' attention to the charts and other forms of documentation found in the text.

Brother K: Thank you, hold up for a minute. Maat read the caption under the picture. Student reads...Okay brothers and sisters, during this time, African Americans are going to be lynched and the numbers are extraordinary, you would not believe the amount of people that will be lynched during this time. And during this time was the best of times for us and also the worst of times for us. Because the southern whites hated what we were trying to do—the house of representatives, members of congress, schools were being built—the so-called growth that we were seeing and they went on a rampage of killing. And Ida B Wells, which we are going to read about later in this chapter, she was keeping research and documentation on these lynchings. She had a newspaper and they were lynching by the thousands during this time.

Brother: Stop please. Let's study the charts.

Ashanti reads: African Americans Lynched on Rape. Charge between 1892-1901. Let's look at it very carefully. Let's look at the alleged rapes and look at the total lynchings. Check it out, look at 1900...

Brother K: check out the graph. (class looks at another graph on lynching)

Student reads the graph; and the words, Molefi Asante

Brother K. Who is Molefi Asante? He is the author of this book, right?

So this is where the information is coming from okay. Everything you put out like this must be documented.

By pointing out the assertion and the documentation, Kofi demonstrated to his students the importance of providing support for their own arguments. As important,

he seemed to push his students to recognize that knowing who the author is as important as what the author is saying.

*Mind mapping activity*

Kofi utilized a pedagogical approach coined ‘Brain Friendly Research,’ developed by Spencer Kagan. As part of this approach, Kofi observed as his students independently sought patterns and constructed meanings about the reading and the discussion about African American leaders speak out. One of the many structures that Kagan designed to help students make meaning is the Team Mind Mapping activity. Students worked in groups, each working with a different colored marker, to create a cognitive map in the center of a piece of chart paper. They drew lines out from the main idea and wrote or symbolized core concepts. From the core concepts, students wrote or drew pictures of ideas that extended out supporting details. By using pictures, graphic symbols, arrows and color, students were able to organize information and create meaning.

Kofi asked one member of each group to write in the center of the paper, “African Americans speak out.” Then each member of the group drew a line that extended from the initial concept and drew a picture or wrote about a concept that came to mind. At the conclusion of the activity, I noticed that students demonstrated basic understandings of the concepts addressed in the textbook. In the chart below, I divided student responses into two categories, main ideas jutting from the initial concept; and, contributions that juttred out of initial concept.

In this mind mapping activity (see Table 6), students seemed to recognize the major contributions of Washington and Dubois. They seemed to understand that the

**Table 6.1: Student Responses to Mind Mapping Activity**

The North and South were educating the kinds of jobs they should have	They should work and have blue collar jobs” Booker T. Washington
“I think Africans should have white collar jobs” WEB Dubois	“It’s better to work with your mind” W.E.B.
“It’s better to work with hard labor” Booker T Washington	Booker T. Washington thought that agriculture was more important than the learning of liberal arts.
Booker T. Washington secretly supported anti lynching campaign	“Booker T. Washington believed in hard labor when W.E.B. Dubois believed in working with your mind and intelligence.
Booker T. Washington did not agree to Dubois’s suggestions	Carter G. Woodson and Washington were major figures during this time.
Major debate between Washington and Dubois (picture with Dubois sitting across from Washington)	Washington met with the president at that time (students recognized that he was highly influential)
Pictorial form: <i>The Souls of Black Folks</i>	Dubois states that it is better to work with your mind moreso than your hands.
Washington created his own school named Tuskegee (he left a legacy) *	Dubois and Washington are both authors of books

two individuals debated about between manual or liberal education. They recognized that Washington was openly connected to the president of the United States and yet secretly connected to Ida B. Wells and the anti-lynching campaign. Finally, they recognized the distinctions in attitudes between the North and the South. Following the mind mapping activity, students were asked to go “on-line” and locate the original

speeches of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois. I am now going to describe how students conducted their Internet research.

*Internet Research*

Kofi asked his students to use the Internet to locate Dubois's essay "Of Mr. Washington and others" from his book, *The Souls of Black folks*. They were to locate the speech that Booker T. Washington gave at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition. I observed students conducting a Google search to find the speeches by placing in the search box the title of each of the speeches. Students, on their own accord, further searched for the Atlanta Compromise speech since it was referenced both in the textbook and in the speech "Of Mr. Washington and others." In addition, students were able to locate images by selecting a Google image search of Washington and Dubois. As students searched, they found pictures and images of African Americans from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the following passage, Kofi noted the response from the students as they researched Washington and Dubois,

The students became excited. It tends to wake up the assignment to be able to use the technology and see Booker T's picture along side the speech; I mean that is amazing to be able to see that image and those words right next to it. And then when you finish with him to be able to go and see W.E.B. Dubois's picture with the Niagra movement and all of these Black men standing around them, the talented tenth and to see his speech. I mean it has a great impact on the children. It brings it right up to date, using something that they are quite familiar with a medium that they are familiar with brings it right home for them.

Here, Kofi makes an important point about the power of positive Black imaging.

African American students see negative imaging of themselves in commercial media.

However, by utilizing the Internet, Black students not only see multiple

representations of Black life, but also representation from a historical context. Thus,

students could dramatize the debate and understand the historical backdrop given the plethora of images and writings available on the Internet about Washington and Dubois.

In addition, both groups located information about the Niagra Movement, the Atlanta Compromise, Tuskegee University and any information that would aid them in winning the debate. As part of the assignment, students were asked to respond to the following questions in order to prepare for the debate.

- What were the merits of Washington's plan?
- Why did DuBois believe that Washington's philosophy of accommodation led to the legal implementation of separate but equal?
- Why did Washington need a public and private strategy for the upliftment of his race?
- What were the merits of DuBois's arguments?

After downloading their primary speeches and other relevant information from the WWW, students gathered in their teams to discuss their strategies for the debate.

### *The Debate*

On the last day of the thematic unit, the entire middle school as well as selected classes from the elementary school filed in the basement to watch the Washington/Dubois debate which consisted of only eighth grade students. The eighth grade students divided into teams. Kofi commenced the debate by citing the rules and introducing each member of the two teams. After, the first member of Dubois team rose and began drawing a map of the U/S. on the white board. In his map, he distinguished between the North and the South. He argued in his opening statement that:

Dubois was from the North and Washington was from the South. Those in the North wanted to continue invisible slavery by not allowing Blacks to have a liberal education, although whites could.

The other team rebutted by arguing that Booker T. Washington left a legacy of Tuskegee University and no other Black man has left such a major contribution to the Black community.

Key points of the debate:

#### Dubois Team

- Even if you are a carpenter you must be able to read and write; you must be able to use your mind and that is what Dubois left us with
- You may be able to build using Washington's method, but you would not be able to manage your money and that is what sharecropping is all about and that will put us in the same dependency state we were in.
- Dubois contributions are all over the Internet

#### Washington's Team

- Washington left one of the greatest schools in the country
- Washington developed a plan that would give jobs to the masses and Dubois was elitist with his idea of the "talented tenth"
- Tuskegee students made their own bricks to build the Tuskegee buildings

The debate ended with members of the audience, the rest of the junior high school, voting on the side with the most logical argument.

### *Transformations*

Initially, the students in Kofi's classroom had limited understandings of the time period, the major players and the major arguments focused on the education of Black people following enslavement. For example, during the initial discussion, Kofi asked his students, "Does anyone know the difference between a liberal arts education and a vocational education?" There was no response. Students looked back and Kofi expectantly. He continued, "okay, listen very carefully to Baba Agyei and he will give you some clarity on that."

Agyei: Dealing with vocational one is more manual using your hands; vocational right now may deal with agricultural and farming. Nowadays, we deal with vocational efforts we might have job studies on the job training. Also, being a mechanic you know they have schools where kids will grow up and learn different trades, carpentry, things of that nature. On the other hand when you are dealing with liberal arts, you are dealing with chance and ability to deal with philosophy; you are talking about learning about science learning business. A lot of it has to do with your social status and your financial status and your economic status in this country. Whether you are going to be a white color or blue color worker in this country...And training you for that kind of development. If you have white color or blue color workers, if you have people who are going to make a certain kind of figure—that is where the difference comes in.

Kofi: Okay, now listen to what Baba said, I know that going to school that I want to be a plumber what kind of education will I receive Hassiss?

Hassiss: mechanic?

Teacher: I want to be a plumber...okay thank you brothers

Okay, I am going to school and I want to be a lawyer, what kind of education will I receive? Alesha what category will that fall under?

Student: Manuel

Kofi: Thank you, please think about what I am saying—the two topics are vocational and liberal education. Okay, Alesia, I am going to school and I want to be a doctor.

Student:liberal education

Kofi: Thank you. I am going to school and I want to be an electrician?

Gary..Go ahead and help her. Very good. I am going to school and I want to be a teacher. So you understand both categories, because these categories are going to become important later as you start to do the work at the end of the chapter.

Brother Agyei then pointed out that certain kinds of training led to either blue-collar or white-collar employment. Kofi used this as a dialectical introduction to foreground the Washington/Dubois debate of what to do with the masses of Black Americans post enslavement. Only after this explanation did students began to draw connection between the kind of education one receives, the kind of job one has and financial status.

Students then participated in the mind mapping activity. This activity was independent of the teacher. Although a few students mentioned that both Dubois and Washington wrote books and that Washington worked secretly with the anti-lynching campaign, the majority of students cited Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois and their arguments as the key concepts in the chapter. In the mind mapping activity, we see students making strong qualitative linkages between kind of education and job and/or economic status. Students wrote:

- “I think Africans should have white collar jobs” WEB Dubois
- “They should work and have blue collar jobs” Booker T Washington
- “It’s better to work with your mind” W.E.B.
- “Booker T. Washington believed in hard labor when W.E.B. Dubois believed in working with your mind and intelligence.”
- Booker T. Washington thought that agriculture was more important than the learning of liberal arts
- Booker T. Washington did not agree to Dubois’s suggestions

After conducting the Internet research and participating in team discussion students seemed to have a more sophisticated understanding of the positions held by Washington and Dubois. Here students on the Dubois team began to draw links between the kind of education one receives and notions of dependency. As it related to the education of Blacks in the South they argued that, “You may be able to build using Washington’s method, but you would not be able to manage your money and that is what sharecropping is all about and that will put us in the same dependency state we were in.” In other words, these students gave credence to the importance of constructing buildings, however, they argued that real liberation occurs when members of the Black community developed skills to think for themselves.

The debate revealed the evolution of two thoughts. First, students recognized that contemporary Blacks are still in a mental state of dependency, not much different than the physical state of dependency of their enslaved ancestors. However, in acknowledging that many members of the Black community lacked some form of autonomy, these students cite “managing money”, building and supporting Black-owned business as a way to eliminate mental and physical dependent states of being. Carter G. Woodson, in his text, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, makes explicit this mental dependency model that plagues the Black community since the Holocaust of Enslavement in the US. In 1933, he asserted that:

When you control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his actions. You do not have to tell him not to stand here or go yonder. He will find his “proper place” and will stay in it. You do not need to send him to the back door. He will go without being told. In fact, if there is no back door, he will cut one for his special benefit. His education makes it necessary.”

These students were, in a sense, breaking the invisible shackles of dependency by arguing for agency on the part of Black community members.

Second, students on both sides of the debate recognized the need for what Agyei Akoto refers to as members of the Black community “owning and controlling the psychic and physical space that they call their own (Akoto, 1992, p.3). In other words, these students viewed the concepts of community control and institution building as important contributions left by both Washington and Dubois (Asante, 1992, Akoto, 1992; Doughty, 1973). They saw the answer for what had to be done with members of the Black community as not only managing one’s own money, but also constructing, owning and supporting Black owned businesses. For example,

students on the Washington side recognized the importance of leaving an institutional legacy, citing that the students making their own bricks was one of the most important contributions left by Washington. In other words, students argued that the Black community must build and create institutional legacies and not rely on outside sources of funding.

Kofi fostered a space where students learned the importance of nationalism as well as the Ngoza Saba principle Kujichagulia (self determination). (see chapter 3). In other words, his students learned through structured activities like the textbook reading, the mind mapping activity, the Internet research and the debate that his students and other members of the Black community, must take control of their own destiny, their institutions and their resources. That includes liberation of the mind, which leads to the freeing of the physical state, not only individually, but for the whole Black community. Kofi, through his classroom practice, exposed his students to these African-centered concepts ideas. He used the computer technology as a counter-hegemonic tool to expose his students to positive imaging and ideas that would lead them to think about agency, autonomy and institution building within the Black community.

### *Summary*

For Kofi, teaching was more than the delivery of material or teaching toward a standardized test. Moreover, teaching was about building connections with his students, fostering a safe environment and affirming his students' Blackness. His pedagogical philosophy, informed by his personal life experiences, focused on debunking notions of dependency and stereotypical imaging of Blackness that

affected and infected his students' psyche. In other words, he fostered an environment where his students learned about the importance of being the constructors of knowledge as well as institution builders for the Black community. Within this frame, computer technology and more specifically, the Internet, became one of many necessary tools to expose students to liberatory narratives of themselves and their African American culture. Via the Internet students saw positive Black imaging, downloaded primary speeches, and explored the historical context during the reconstruction. Thus, Kofi's story sheds light on one of many ways that computer technology can be used as a counter hegemonic tool to engage students about their roles in society. In the following two chapters, I will focus on what transformative pedagogy that infuses computer technology looks like in inner-urban public school classrooms where the focus is on the development of student voice.

## Chapter 7

### Christina Cooper The 3 R's: "Resistance, Revolution and Rising Up"

#### *Background*

Christina Cooper's philosophy and teaching practice was shaped by her sense of activism and her personal commitment to creating spaces for her Black students to develop agency in their community. I first became aware of her passion and commitment while attending a talk on multicultural education given by Enid Lee<sup>17</sup> and sponsored by the Teaching for Change organization. Cooper intrigued me from the moment I laid eyes on her. She was a fireball—passionate, outspoken and committed to changing the quality of education for Black children. When the Master of Ceremonies introduced Cooper as a Roosevelt City Public School teacher, I was shocked and awed. I thought to myself, "Hmmm, Roosevelt City Public School teachers have changed. I never would have thought that a Roosevelt teacher would be this forthright about injustice and racism in such a public forum." Having served several years as a Roosevelt Public School teacher, I experienced firsthand the consequences and then retributions that came from speaking out against institutionalized racism and advocating for the rights of marginalized students.

I watched as Cooper embraced the challenging task of introducing Lee to an audience of more than 150 educators, directors, professors including the president of the Board of Education. She eloquently and fervently spoke about how learning and

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<sup>17</sup> Enid Lee is an anti-racist teacher educator. She was born and raised in the Caribbean and has worked in the field of language, culture and race for more than twenty years.

understanding the tenets of anti-racist teaching not only changed her pedagogy, but also affected her personal life. She said, “I knew I had finally found a community when I heard Lee echoing the same concerns I had about the education of Black children.” As she spoke, I marveled at her confidence, humility and care.

Simultaneously, I understood well her struggle to find a sense of community, a voice that validated her growing frustration with American public schools lack of respect for Black children. At that time, I did not know it, but Cooper and I would later cross paths. She would share her ngona about how she exposes her Black students, many of whom do not have access to computer technology from their home, to necessary computer technology skills not only in preparation for the workforce, but in preparation for life. More specifically, Cooper told me how she used Microsoft Word processing software as a medium to help her Black students develop and trust in their “voice” by naming their reality.

### *The Evolution of Teaching Philosophy*

Early in our conversations it became clear that activism in the form of teaching was Cooper’s spiritual calling. As I listened for her story, I found that her passion for teaching and social change was intricately linked to her ongoing experiences with racial oppression. Throughout our weeks of intense conversations, I came to understand that mediating themes of racial injustice and pressing toward social change informed her activist stance as an adult.

Cooper, born February 3, 1951, spent her early years in the racially-segregated town of Wilson, North Carolina. Like Kofi and Jones, Cooper’s experiences during the Jim Crow era would become the seeds for her activist approach and would ground

her teaching in relation to Black students. Ironically, during our initial gatherings, her experiences with racism as a child did not surface. A few months into the study, I gently probed her about her experiences as a child growing up in the Deep South. I was surprised by the intensity of her story, which leaped out of her mouth as if waiting to become unleashed. Cooper intensely and systematically recalled her limited experiences with white students from her hometown.

Cooper vividly remembered riding the “colored” school bus to “a school that, of course, was not one of the better schools, the quality of the structure itself was poor”—everyday passing the well-resourced White school. As a first grader, riding on the bus to school she recalled that:

The only interaction we had with white students was when our busses passed on the road at the same point everyday...and the names they would call us, mainly NIGGER, every morning, and sometimes there were rocks thrown at the bus and this lasted for about four years...

Like many African American families during this period of overt racial segregation in the South, Cooper’s family migrated to the north to Roosevelt City when she was in fourth grade. They, like many Black families during this time, hoped and prayed that life in the North would bring safety and better economic opportunities. Unfortunately, the racism that she experienced as a young girl growing up in the South left an indelible mark. As a result of its pervasiveness and profound effect, Cooper learned to compare and contrast the degrees and kinds of racism in the North and South. Based on Cooper’s observations, she argued that the institutionalized racism experienced in Roosevelt City, albeit more subtle, rivaled the overt racism prevalent in the South.

As Cooper continued to share her *ngona*, she also recalled the vast majority of Black teachers she met throughout her schooling experiences. Although “good” Black teachers taught Cooper throughout the majority of her schooling career, she remembers the positive influence of one teacher and role model, Mrs. Franklin. This teacher was her first grade instructor. At a time in the Deep South when social class and skin color (lightness and darkness) had a stronghold on how Blacks treated each other, Cooper remembers that Mrs. Franklin treated all of her students, including those of a darker hue, equally.

One of Cooper’s fondest memories of Mrs. Franklin was the frequent home visits that enabled Cooper to build deep and long-lasting connections to her teacher. As a result of Franklin’s advocacy, Cooper became May Day Queen, which was an honor traditionally held by lighter-skinned Black girls:

I recollect that it was a Sunday afternoon and Mrs. Franklin came over to my mother’s house to tell her that I was the May Day queen. I was shocked because every year it was always a little half-white [black] girl, straight hair, blah, blah, blah. Mrs. Franklin wanted to make sure that I was going to have the white socks with the lace and white gloves and I was just so excited—Mrs. Franklin came by everyday to make sure that I was prepared.

Thus, ‘care’ as showered upon Cooper by Franklin blurred the boundaries between personal and professional, between teacher and student. In a sense, Franklin became an “other-mother” to Cooper, just as she had done for many other students. In addition to caring and supporting Cooper throughout her early years of schooling, Cooper credits Franklin for sparking her love of reading as well as her relentless ability to believe that all things were possible.

In the 1960’s, after graduating from Roosevelt City Public Schools, Cooper pursued a degree in architectural engineering, a field that was dominated by white,

middle class males. Following graduation, Cooper acquired a position with an architecture firm. After one year, bored with the prospect of continuing in architecture, Cooper opted to attend a teacher education program devoted to technology education at the University of Roosevelt. The goal of this program was to develop public school teachers in the field of technology and architecture. While taking coursework, John Graham, the last White superintendent of Roosevelt Public schools, noticed Cooper's curriculum-writing ability. Graham was so impressed with Cooper's skills that he requested her drafting curriculum for the district. Cooper had developed this particular curriculum for a class project so her immediate response was "I don't care as long as I get a grade." Shortly after adopting the curriculum, Graham attempted to recruit Cooper for the Roosevelt Public schools. He told her that she could teach at the junior high school of her choice. In 1972, after much resistance, she agreed and became the first woman to teach the drafting course.

Cooper's life as a young female Black educator teaching in the male-dominated discipline of drafting and mechanical drawing was not easy. Like Black educators of the past, Cooper had to battle both sexism and racism in her teaching career:

I had to file a class action discrimination suit. It was my first day of school and the principal said, "I did not know that you were a female. I have never heard of a female industrial arts teacher. I want you to report back downtown and tell them that I do not need you." I wasn't too thrilled about teaching but I knew that didn't smell right. So I reported back downtown. I didn't tell him that the superintendent was the one who recruited me and I went directly to the Title IX office. The principal did not know what he had done. He did not think I would have sense enough to pursue it. They sent me back. He got his hands spanked.

In the 1960's, problematic assumptions made about the capabilities of women in the workplace were common. Images of Black women as intellectually inferior, sexually

deviant as well as more emotional and less rational (Hill-Collins, 1998) have controlled and dominated public perception. These stereotypical images of Black women have historically contributed towards their discriminatory treatment. Even today, these images remain prevalent. This episode in which Cooper spoke out against the raced and sexed nature of schooling was her first experience; however, it was certainly not her last. Over the course of the next thirty years, Cooper came to be known throughout the district as a leading ‘champion’ for both teacher and student rights.

Today, Cooper remains unmarried and serves as a mechanical drawing teacher at Ward Middle School. She has had six school transfers during her more than twenty six years of teaching in Roosevelt City Public Schools. While four of the transfers were voluntary, two came as a result of her advocating for teacher and student rights and against the unjust conditions of her workplace. Currently, she is pleased and comfortable with her present position. Throughout the interviews and classrooms observations, two themes emerged that best capture the essence of Cooper’s teaching practice— commitment to social change and focus on students’ experiences. Threaded throughout each of these teaching practices was Cooper’s desire to foster a space where her students developed their voice. I will begin with a discussion of how Cooper’s teaching identity emerged.

### *The Merging of Identity and Teaching*

All four of the transformative teachers’ talk focused on ways they countered the endemic nature of racism in their teaching. However, Cooper seemed to be the

most critical of institutionalized racism and the ways it manifested itself in regard to the inner-urban schooling for Black youth. She criticized the school curriculum and limited course offerings made available to her Black students at Ward Middle School arguing that “a lot of the course offerings are basic because it [the school] serves mostly low-income, Black students in a certain part of the city.” Thus, she argued that the levels and quality of the courses offered at Ward were not competitive with schools in more affluent areas of Roosevelt. Additionally, she criticized the curriculum and textbooks because she believed that they failed to authentically reflect the cultural and personal realities of her students. Furthermore, she rejected the over-reliance on standardized testing as the primary means of assessment, believing that high stakes tests led to the elimination of “good teaching.” Threaded throughout each of our conversations was evidence that Cooper was someone who not only “talked the talk”, but she also “walked the walk”.

...because teaching is a social action, too!

Like the other transformative teachers in this study, Cooper thought of teaching as more than a job. As in the “tradition” of transformative Black teachers (Foster, 1997; Siddle-Walker, 1993; Lynn, 2001), Cooper believed that the ‘personal was political.’ In other words, politics permeated every sphere of her life. In turn, she developed her curriculum in ways that linked to larger systems of social structures. Amidst her demanding schedule as a classroom teacher, union representative, and student advocate, Cooper ran for union president of Roosevelt Public Schools. She was also an active member of several organizations including The Roosevelt Writing

Project, Teaching for Change and Roosevelt VOICE. This strong political activism and union affiliation is not uncommon for Black women teachers. Revisionist historians remind us that political activism is a trademark for many Black, female teachers and helps us to understand further the multifaceted nature of teaching practices of African American teachers (Fairclough, 2001; Fultz, 1995; Littlefield, 1994).

As part of her self-delegated teaching responsibilities, Cooper spent countless hours building informal networks between Roosevelt schoolteachers. She sent out flyers to all Roosevelt teachers via emails, participated in marches and provided testimonies to Roosevelt school board members. In fact, I came to learn how Cooper influenced another transformative teacher in my study. One afternoon, I recall walking into Jones' classroom. She was frantically handing her students applications to receive a free home computer and printer. This free computer program was sponsored by the Benton organization. Not only did Cooper inform her students of the free computer program, but she also faxed the information to each Roosevelt City Public School. During one of our many conversations, Cooper expressed to me that she felt obligated to share this information because she believed that all Black children in the Roosevelt deserved a home computer. She added:

Our schools are so depleted. I read the application and it sounded legit. And, I said 'our schools deserve to have a laptop lab.' When you think of the outcome of that happening, faxing a piece of paper to 146 schools is not work. Can you imagine schools that are not getting any resources to technology suddenly having access to a free lab where every child in that school who is on free lunch can have a laptop? Imagine what it would mean for you to give a child a homework assignment who you knew had a computer at home. I can count on two hands how many [of my] students [who] have a computer.

Cooper viewed access to the Internet as a human right, not a privilege. More specifically, she believed that lack of access to the Internet and computer-related technologies limited her students' educational possibilities. She saw computers as a necessary tool in her students' learning experience. Cooper's heightened awareness of the lack of access to resources for students attending Roosevelt's inner-urban schools led her to seek outside funding for her Black students. It seemed as though she did not view this as an extra responsibility or a burden, rather she seemed to welcome opportunities to apply for and disseminate information about various grants as part of her communal responsibility. When asked why she sought outside funding, she responded that she wanted her Black students to have the same opportunities as those students attending more affluent schools.

Along with writing grants and keeping teachers in the system aware of opportunities to access additional resources, Cooper took it upon herself to email teachers in masse about emergency budget meetings, voucher updates, union meetings and opportunities to protest. She believed it was part of her responsibility as a teacher activist to keep other Roosevelt teachers abreast of the political atmosphere inside as well as outside of the classroom. For example, on March 15, 2003, I received an email from Cooper that read: "Join other Roosevelt Teachers and others today for the Anti-War demonstration. The people of the world have been rising up against the war and the Bush administration's foreign policy over the past few months. Now it is time to turn up the heat." The email closes with the following phrase, "because teaching is a social act, too!" This email is representative of the myriad of correspondence Cooper

disseminated to me and others, as a means of keeping Roosevelt teachers informed about civic matters.

Like Jones and St. John, Cooper's childhood experiences deeply influenced her teaching. However, she found that her ongoing participation in professional organizations and development workshops sustained and aided her understanding of the overt and subtle nature of White hegemony. Therefore she surrounded herself with likeminded teachers who shared her vision and who pushed her to think about her teaching practice and her own identity in richer and deeper ways. She shared that organizations like Teaching for Change and the Writers Workshop helped her to meet and foster close relationships with like-minded individuals. In addition, these supportive networks helped Cooper to become more reflective about her teaching practice in ways she hoped would make the schooling process more comprehensible and meaningful for her Black students.

These invaluable conversations and interactions with like-minded individuals become a catalyst through which she could design her teaching in ways that provide structures for her own students to trust and develop their voice. She explained that,

My summers are spent engaged in any kind of professional development that furthers the agenda for me. If there is an institute on equity in the city, I'm going to go. Because I think it is important for me as an African American teacher teaching majority African American students...I believe it is a part of my duty to teach my students how to take care of themselves in a world that doesn't treat everybody fair. I know it's been tough for me navigating it and that came with some experience and some training. But students who have nothing but the so-called book knowledge, no sense of self-consciousness, no sense of their own history, that's not a good place for anybody to be right now.

As evidenced by the quote, Cooper was an ongoing learner. She saw it as her responsibility to not only develop professionally in her content area, but also to remain mindful of ways to build in her students a sense of Black consciousness and communal responsibility. Within that frame, “book knowledge” is not equivalent to a “good education.” As I listened to her share her thoughts on her responsibility as a Black educator, I was reminded of an African American saying my grandmother always repeated, *Brought you books and sent you to school, but you still ain’t nothing but—an educated fool!* Cooper expressed the same sentiments by arguing that “book knowledge,” especially those textbooks used in American public schools, do little to prepare Black students for larger U.S. society since they are designed to maintain existing social structures. Thus, Cooper passed down all that she knew in order to help her Black students understand and combat the pervasive nature of racism. As a part of the formula for combating racism, building self-awareness, a sense of Black consciousness and knowledge of one’s Black history became critical factors.

I view Cooper’s positionality as one of a Black womanist, pedagogue. Henry (1998) defines Black womanist pedagogues as those who oppose dominant structures in order to guide their students towards Black liberation. Henry refers to these women as womanist because they are simultaneously “cultural, political, educational and spiritual.” (p. 3). In the same vein as many Black womanist pedagogues, Cooper seemed to strive to help her Black students name their own reality and to make good choices while living in a White, racist society.

For instance, Cooper fundamentally believed that her Black students were going to have to be better. She fervently expressed, “it’s not enough for them to be as

good as their White counterparts. They are going to have to be better because they are brown. Sorry to say, but it's true." "Being better" in this case demonstrated Cooper's acknowledgement of the institutionally raced and classed nature of society. She debunked the notion of meritocracy arguing that her students "Blackness" and class location limited their opportunities in relation to their White counterparts. Therefore, she attempted to push her students to become more independent, more self aware and more analytical.

When asked, What does teaching mean to you? Cooper responded,

Teaching means educating children for life. And I don't mean just the 3Rs, I'm talking about the 3Rs plus some other Rs. Like teaching them how to resist, teaching them how to be a revolutionary and teaching them how to rise up.

Teaching to Cooper translated into grounding her Black students in an understanding of how to live and negotiate within White supremacist society. As a result, Cooper's teaching philosophy expanded the traditional notion of the 3R's (Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic). Her definition of teaching included ways for her to provide a space for her students to challenge dominant notions, practices and policies while affirming her students' Blackness.

As a point of departure for teaching her Black students, she focused on the important skill of critical thinking. She admonished students who took information at face value. She stated, "we must educate kids to become critical thinkers and critically literate. It's not enough for them just to be able to read. They've got to read between lines." As a teacher she attempted to connect the lives of her Black students to larger socio-political systems. She encouraged her students to construct and enact plans that would counter destructive racialized policy that served to further

marginalize members of the Black communities. To this end, she attempted to foster a space where students could think of themselves as playing an active role in solving problems that plagued members of the Black community.

#### Reflecting on her teaching, seeing the student

Over the last 10 years, Cooper's practice evolved to one that validated her students' experiences in the curriculum. This attitude is, in part, a result of her experiences as a child. As a young student, she vividly remembered being deeply affected by a teacher who disliked her at first glance. Cooper encountered Betty Swinson, a Black teacher, when she moved to Roosevelt city in the fourth grade and attended Rosemont Elementary School. Cooper spoke of Swinson's internalized racist attitudes by remembering "...and talk about class conscious. She was a fair skinned, Black teacher who despised children who were brown and often made comments about them." As a naive young girl, Cooper was deeply enraged and hurt by the remarks made by Swinson, but never commented. She remembered Swinson asking the principal to detain Cooper and her sister. Swinson reasoned that schools in the South were inferior to those in the North; therefore, Cooper and her sister were not on grade level. At Swinson's request, Cooper and her sister took reading tests and to Swinson's dismay, they were promoted to the next grade level.

From this experience Cooper learned that young children are vulnerable. As a young impressionable student, Cooper internalized those negative feelings. These thoughts stayed with her for the rest of her life. As a result of this experience, she realized the significant role that educators play. Cooper learned that as a teacher, she

must remain reflective and mindful of how she created spaces where her students developed and trusted their voice.

By developing a reflective stance, Cooper has learned to embrace her students' experiences. For instance, she recalled immediately altering her classroom practice after attending a summer institute where the speaker, Enid Lee, shared that teachers expect students to come into their classroom and learn although teachers ask them to park their lives outside the classroom. At the time, she guiltily admitted that she questioned her students' hair styles, baggy pants, conversations in the classroom about Snoop Doggy Dog and what happened in the "hood" last night. Upon reflection, Cooper asked herself "why would students want to learn something that has no connection to who they are and where they come from?" She further shared with me that she understood why her students asked the question, "why do I need to learn this?"

Cooper used her keen insights as well as assistance from her colleagues at Teaching for Change and the Writing Project to design lessons for her students that allowed them to develop their personal and cultural identities. Like the other transformative teachers in this study, Cooper found that "textbooks were limiting" and rarely reflective of her students Black images, history or culture. Therefore, she designed her lessons in ways that reflected the cultural and personal experiences of her students. During a conversation, Cooper shared that now she begins planning each lesson or unit with the question of "who are my students?" in hopes of fostering an environment where her students feel as though their experiences are included in the curriculum.

*Perspectives on the Internet and Computer Related Technologies*

Cooper found that computer technology facilitated the learning of her Black students in two meaningful ways. She believed that computer technology, when used well, provided exposure to unlimited resources and met her students' specific learning styles. In this section, I will explore Cooper's perspectives on the role of technology in her teaching practice.

Like all of the transformative teachers in this study, Cooper relied on the Internet as an important tool for accessing information. The following comment is illustrative of the importance she placed on Internet access in the lives of her students:

...[computer technology] makes it more convenient to learn. Teachers without resources can innovate, but you can't innovate technology. It's best to have it. And having [students] who know how to use it...that is powerful. Some people think that technology [in the classroom] is a frill. It is not. It's a necessary tool. When you think of the [kind of] leverage of the students with access to [computer technology] have over students who don't. And think about the unfair conditions that it creates when you stack those two students up to test their knowledge base and one has access to all the information in the world and the other has access to only information in books in their classrooms. Having Internet access brings the world almost into your classroom. It expands your classroom.

Viewed in this light, access to and meaningful uses of computer technology exposed her Black students to a plethora of resources beyond that of the "official curriculum." In Cooper's mind, access to technological resources, in a way, helped to level the playing field for her Black students. Here, Cooper, like Jones, juxtaposed information found in the official curriculum with that information found on the Internet. In essence, Cooper seemed to understand that the Internet served as a vital conduit for exposing her students to an abundance of resources written from diverse perspectives unlike the mandated Roosevelt school curriculum.

Cooper further explained how she used the Internet in her classroom practice. For example, if she wanted her students to research information about school vouchers and its impact on poor Black children attending Roosevelt City Public Schools, they could “go online” and search for articles to help them develop a clear understanding of the important tenets of the policy. She asserted:

They could search on Milwaukee School District or Rethinking Schools or Teaching for Change or Cleveland School District or voucher city or voucher lobby line and they could pull up all of the research. Even in the general accounting office there is data on vouchers. They could find all of this information within seconds to develop, support or refute opinions.

Access to the Internet, Cooper pointed out not only provided her students with mass and critical information from multiple sources, but also provided the information quickly and efficiently.

Cooper also believed that the Internet and computer related technologies met the multiple learning needs of diverse Black learners. She found that her Black students were highly engaged while using computer technology. She surmised that the visual, auditory and tactile features of the computer engaged her students in ways that a textbook did not. During an interview she explained,

Cooper: For some reason technology is able to work for most of the students that I come in contact with. Something about computer technology engages them. I have students who may shy away from a lesson because they have trouble reading or because they cannot write. They will do both of those on a computer.

R: Why?

Cooper: Because it's more interactive. It's more than just black words on a piece of paper. They are looking at a screen. When you have text on a computer screen with graphics and then to add animated graphics on top of that....that's why television is so mesmerizing.

Cooper argued that computer technology is potentially congruent to her students' diverse learning styles. In the way it is used, the computer engaged her students' senses. Cooper found that her Black students were able to hear, touch and visualize; in essence, they were simultaneously using multiple senses to learn, making the computer a powerful educational tool in the urban classroom.

*The Thematic Unit: Developing "Voice" through Autobiographical Writing using  
Microsoft Word Processing Software*

Description

I observed Cooper's classroom practice several times over the course of one month. In that time, her thematic unit focused on autobiographical writing and the development of student voice. Her objectives for this thematic unit were three-fold: 1) to embrace and include her Black students' experiences in the curriculum; 2) to strengthen her students' expository writing skill; and, 3) to demonstrate to her students how to use Microsoft Word processing software as a critical tool to facilitate the writing process.

Cooper expressed to me the importance of connecting her students' lived experiences to the writing assignment. She sought to "use her students' lives as the primary text as opposed to using a textbook that leaves her students' lives out of the story." She said,

Imagine if you were forced to use textbooks that excluded you and your history. That has an impact on them...imagine if you study the last 12 years in public school and you are forced to use textbooks where the images don't look anything like you and the people don't share your history. You begin to feel invaluable. And that can have an impact on self-esteem and concept.

Cooper recognized the detrimental impact of privileging European culture, history, experiences and imaging on her Black students psyche. On one level, she spoke to

the powerful messages that were sent to Black students who were mandated to read textbooks that are predominately Eurocentric. On a deeper level, Cooper addressed the ongoing marginalization of the Black experiences in the textbook. Therefore, Cooper designed this thematic unit in ways that centralized her students' experiences.

Second, Cooper wanted her students to learn the skill of elaboration. She found that the editing capabilities of the Microsoft software programs helped her students take more risks with their writing. In the following conversation, she shared her thoughts about why Microsoft Word software programs help facilitate the development of voice for her Black students.

When I think back to students who tell you at the very beginning when you ask them to do a pre-write on any subject. The first words are, "I can't write. What do you want me to write." They don't trust their own voices. They don't trust their own words... So I would have to say the most important thing is using the computer to develop students' voice, to help them to find their own voice and using it as a tool for editing their work. Because the revision and editing phase of their writing is the most painful part for reluctant writers, they say, "you mean I have to do it all over?" The notion of starting a paper [all over] that they think is good is a killer.

On the computer they can move paragraphs, they can delete, shift them down to the bottom, delete sentences, move them, copy and paste them some place else, save the first draft and copy it on the second page and make it the second draft, revise and edit that, copy that and make their third draft without ever picking up a pen or a pencil or using a sheet of paper.

By using a word processor, Cooper believed that the "painful" process of revising and rewriting commonly associated with pen and paper editing was eliminated. She added, "its powerful...no red lines. It makes [my students] want to revise. It takes the tediousness out of starting over." As a student, Cooper recalled seeing her papers marked up with red ink—often referred to as the "bloody paper." She never forgot when a professor red-lined her paper and wrote, "too verbose" all the way across the

text. To this day, she recalled “25-40 years later, I still remember ‘too verbose,’ for me it almost killed the joy of writing.”

Cooper found that composing essays on the computer placed the focus on the content as opposed to the “process” on the editing. Cooper was well aware of the advantages her Black students would have if proficient in word processing programs. However, based on her observations, her students came into her classroom not knowing how to type or how to use editing tools such as cut, paste, copy, spell, check etc. As Cooper inferred, when attending inner-city schools, it was not a guarantee that all students would leave with basic word processing skills, although it is a necessity in the U.S. workplace and in larger society. She underscored the process of writing using Microsoft Word processing tools in order to prepare her Black students for life outside of Ward Middle School.

On the first day of instruction for the thematic unit, Cooper disseminated a survey for her students to complete. With assistance from the director of a progressive educational organization, Cooper developed this survey as a way of getting to know her students. During one of our conversations, she explained that she wanted to “invite her students’ lives into the classroom and intermingle [them] with what [she] was teaching.” The survey began with a letter to her students inviting them to divulge their personal interests, likes and dislikes. The letter read as follows:

Dear Students,

The more teachers know about their students, the more interesting and useful they can make their lessons. So, please take the time out to answer the questions below. Add any information about yourself that you think your teachers should know about you but did not ask. Your personal responses will be kept confidential. The responses will be compiled to give an overall picture of the variety of interests and experiences of Ward students.

Two ideas occurred to me as I read this letter. First, Cooper is encouraging her students to bring their lives into the classroom. She is also providing a rationale for why she values her students' experiences and opinions.

During the initial lesson, Cooper reiterated to her students why she valued their opinions and experiences. Through storytelling, she eloquently shared how she came to use this student-centered approach in her teaching practice. She expressed that a few years earlier she wanted a group of her eighth grade students to understand the importance of the Civil Rights Movement. She mistakenly assumed that her Black students would naturally be engaged in the topic since it concerned the Black community's struggle for freedom and equal rights in the U.S. Cooper was wrong. Her students emphatically voiced that the Civil Rights Movement had nothing to do with them.

Cooper decided to make the Civil Rights Movement relevant to her students' experiences by telling the story of a Black boy who lived on the street around the corner from their school. He was denied admittance to Ward Middle School, at the time, it was all-White. Cooper explained that in 1954, their school was involved in a law suit for integration that eventually made its way to the Supreme Court. This story about Ward sparked her students' interest. Cooper added that her students began to question why Ward was now all-Black. Furthermore, they wanted to know why the resources at Ward were limited if at one time it had been a premier school. Cooper stated that by making her lessons relevant to her students, they naturally became interested in Civil Rights issues. She continued to explain to her class that:

Once I did that lesson, I realized that students in Ward were interested and that they gained so much knowledge about that case which connected them to other civil rights issues. They were excited about Civil Rights issues. It was connected to them; it was connected to their community. It was connected to their lives. So I decided to make every lesson that I teach connected to who you are. I can't do that unless I know who you are. What subjects would Marcus prefer if I asked Marcus? It might be band; it might be music, it might be math. It helps me to understand what kind of resources to bring into the room. For example, I found out from reading one's student survey that she loved Jet magazine. Well, one of my neighbors has tons of Jets. She said she would donate them to the class.

The survey, then, became a springboard for getting to know her students, for building her course curriculum and for creating her classroom environment. She explicitly asked students about who they were and interests they held. By employing the survey, she demonstrated that she valued her Black students' thoughts and experiences.

Cooper distributed the survey, which consisted of questions such as the following:

1. What is your favorite radio station?
2. What groups do you like to listen to?
3. What is the best movie you saw last year?
4. Who is your favorite actor and why?
5. What sport do you play?
6. What sport do you like to watch?
7. Do you have a paying job after school or on the weekend?
8. What television show(s) do you like best and why?
9. What is your favorite subject in school? Why?
10. What do you like best about living in Roosevelt City?

Cooper realized that the survey was incomplete, since it did not include input from her students. To account for this omission, she probed her students to find out if there were important questions absent. In a sense, she wanted her students to be co-constructors of the survey. I found that her students seemed surprised by this request.

However, Marquita, an aspiring poet, raised her hand to make a suggestion:

Marquita: What mood do you feel like you are most in?"

Cooper: Your mood, that's excellent. So Marquita, don't be afraid to talk about that. Talk about your up moments, your down moments, moments that you are at your best.

I highlight this conversation as a way of demonstrating how Cooper values her students' voice, thoughts and ideas. Cooper also viewed her survey as a work in progress, constantly evolving to meet the present needs of her student.

During this stage of writing, Cooper told her students to answer each question by typing the beginning of the sentence and the response into Microsoft Word. She explained that the answers would become the basis of the autobiography. For example, one student wrote, *My favorite radio station is WPGA, 96.5.*

At this phase, Cooper expressed to the class that there was no concern for spelling or grammar errors. Proper formatting, however, was encouraged. Cooper wanted her students to use Times Roman 12 pt while answering the questions for two reasons. She found that her students, without guidelines, tended to use "word art" because they associated the colorful aesthetics with substance. Cooper, therefore, wanted to provide a formatting strategy at the onset. Second, she wanted her students to become familiar with the formatting standards required by most high schools and universities. Her hope was for her Black students to become exposed to the process of composing essays using computer technology.

During the next phase of writing, Cooper focused on the process of elaboration. By taking advantage of the Microsoft word processing tools, she told each student to place their "curser" behind each initial response and then answer the question, "why?" For example, Shante wrote in this phase

My favorite radio station is WPGA 96.5, why because to me I like this station better then all the rest and they tell you the news and play music.

In the next draft of the autobiography, Cooper asked her students to revise, rethink and rewrite. Cooper encouraged them to further elaborate on their responses by adding vivid details. In many cases, she worked individually with each student, probing their answers and searching for more detail. During a classroom observation she told students, “for each answer you provided, I want you to give three statements supporting that answer.” She then provided a personal example of what she expected. She stated,

WPPC is my favorite radio station. I like it because when I am driving to work they have music, sandwiched in between news. This station gives me music for the morning if I want something that is easy listening. Some people say that it sounds like elevator music. Well, this music relaxes me. It calms my nerves. It gets me ready for the day.

Spelling and grammar became important during this writing stage. Cooper further encouraged her students to take advantage of the tools available on Microsoft Word in order to facilitate the editing process. In addition, Cooper focused on sequencing and transitional statements during this phase. Lavice wrote,

The best thing about living in Roosevelt City is that it is very fun. I love my ‘hood because I am surrounded by family and friends. If I had the power to change anything about this city, I would tell people to stop shooting and stop the violence. I have lost too many family members to violence....

In the final stage, students were asked to share pieces of their autobiographical essays with their classmates. I was surprised that on that day of sharing, only two students volunteered to present their work. One student shared, “mine is very, very personal.”

However, when I glanced over the initial assignment, I realized that students wrote with the assumption that the autobiography would be kept confidential.

In this section, I focused on describing the thematic unit. In what follows, I will highlight specifically pedagogical choices Cooper made in order to facilitate the writing process and the use of computer technology. She utilized storytelling and individualized instruction to encourage the use of student voice and to broaden her students' computer technological skills.

### Transformative Pedagogy using Technology

#### *Storytelling*

Storytelling became an important pedagogical medium in Cooper's classroom practice. During a conversation she shared her reasons for utilizing storytelling.

...Black folks-- that is what we do. We tell stories (not lies) and preach, you know--storytelling. A lot of the learning that I know from before school came from storytelling. You remember them as if they were told yesterday. It is part of our culture. It is natural for teachers—Black teachers especially. When I told my students about the little Black boy that came to Ward Middle School and couldn't get in, I introduced it with a story. If I want to read about Ruby Bridges, I introduced the book with a story.

As Cooper revealed in this quote, she privileges storytelling as a way of knowing. In addition, she sees storytelling as deeply rooted and connected to lives and experiences of Black people. Lawrence, in his analysis of storytelling, shares Cooper's beliefs about its powerful connection to people of African descent. He expresses that “storytelling, the articulation of experience and imagination in narrative, poetry and song, is an important part of the African tradition.” (p.343)

Cooper used storytelling in multiple ways. In the above quote, she used storytelling as a way to involve her students' in the assignment. Additionally, she told stories of her personal experiences as a way of thinking about or modeling the process of elaboration. She also told stories to help her students feel comfortable in telling their own cultural stories, traditions or rituals. For example, on one occasion, Cooper reminded her students that as they wrote about their colorful life experiences, they must include details such as their age and year. One student yelled out, "Oh yeah, I wrote that when I was two, I had the chicken pox." Cooper immediately responded with a story about a time when she had chicken pox. She laughed and said:

I was a child down south. My mother said that when you had chicken pox, you were supposed to go outside and let a chicken jump over your head. So I was only four years old and those chickens almost scared me to death. Put those interesting stories in your paper. That is what captures the reader.

By sharing this story, Cooper attempted to get her students excited about their writing assignment. She also wanted to model ways to make the story come alive for the reader. Finally, she wanted her students to develop the skill of elaboration by utilizing a familiar African American cultural tradition. I would argue that, in a sense, Cooper embedded the use of computer technology in her teaching practice through storytelling. In other words, computer technology became a tool to disseminate cultural tales of the Black experience.

Cooper also used storytelling as a way for students to learn to trust their own voice by encouraging self-definition. As a result of the images in mass media that depict Black images and lifestyles much different than those of her Black students, Cooper expressed that her students have come to believe that their realities are abnormal. However, Cooper provided a space for her students' stories to be unveiled.

The following passage demonstrated how Cooper retells a story of one of her student's visit to the barbershop with the hope of getting other students to share their personal narratives. She told the class:

One little boy talked about the gash in his head when he was getting his hair cut. He was only 3 years old, but he described the whole trip to the barber shop as if it happened yesterday and he's in the 7th grade. He said that his mother took him to the barbershop and there were 2 barbers. The two barbers were talking and not paying attention and the razor buried down into his head. And he still has the scar, no hair grows there. The kids thought it was funny and he laughed.

Through storytelling, she provided a safe space for her students to share and express information about themselves, their family and their community. Cooper also helped her students realize that the daily incidents that occurred in their own lives were "normal" and valid. Cooper designed her instruction and use of technology in ways that allowed her students to re-present and validate their realities through their writing.

### *Individualized Instruction*

Like Jones and St. John, Cooper found that individualized instruction worked best for her Black students while using computer technology. She could assist her students with technical questions while at the same time help her students with the elaboration process. In the following illustrations, I demonstrate how Cooper individually instructed her students throughout the unit.

For instance, Tamia struggled with how to answer one of the questions on the survey. Cooper sat next Tamia to help her re-conceptualize the question.

Tamia: I am struggling with the question, what do I like about Roosevelt City?

Cooper: What are the things you like best?

Tamia: I don't like Roosevelt City?

Cooper: How long have you been here?

Tamia: All of my life?

Cooper: Well, why don't I see that in your paper, I don't like Roosevelt City, I have been here all of my life.

Tamia: Well, I do like Virginia.

Cooper: This is what I want you to understand. Just because the question reads what are the things you like best about Roosevelt does not mean you have to respond that way. If you don't like the city say it. But I want you to elaborate on why. So what you just shared with me, I have been here all of my life, I want you to share that with me. Were you born here? Say I was born and raised in Roosevelt city. Although I was born here, I don't like the city and then go on to tell me why.

Tamia: Okay.

Cooper: Then go on to tell me what your favorite place is. What is your favorite place?

Tamia: South Carolina

Cooper: I like South Carolina too, for a number of reasons. I want to see if your reasons are the same as mine.

Here, Cooper worked with Tamia to name her own reality. This is done in two ways.

First, Cooper provided a space for her student to rethink the question, "what things do I like about Roosevelt City" to fit her personal needs. In her conversation, Cooper pointed out, "if you don't like the city, say it. Elaborate about this in your paper."

Second, she probed Tamia by asking her specific questions that would help her articulate her thoughts.

In another example, Cooper helped John by pushing him to think about his perceptions of himself as a reader. John wrote in his autobiographical essay that he does not read books. His draft read, "I don't read books at all because when I get home I have to babysit." After reading this section of the draft, Cooper engaged in the following exchange with John:

Cooper: You have read several books. The last book you read was *Si Si Puede*.

John: I forgot about that book. I really liked that book.

Cooper: In your paper it is important for you to be clear to your reader. You don't want your reader to have the impression that you don't read at all. If you

leave the paper this way without elaborating, the reader would think, this child is in eighth grade and he does not read books. Is that true?

John: No...

John then typed, "I do read books in school. The last book I read was *Si Si Puede*. I also read, *House on Mango Street*."

Here, Cooper reminded her student that not only did he read, but he had read a couple of books in the past two weeks. By prodding him to elaborate, John, came to recognize that in certain contexts he was a reader.

While working individually with another student, Cooper demonstrated to Michael, how to cut and paste using Microsoft Word software tools. Here, she spent several minutes talking him through the process. As a form of assessment, she asked him to perform the steps so that she could monitor his understanding.

Cooper: Edit—Before you begin pasting, ask yourself where am I pasting? See look, you are still on page one. How do you get to page two, click behind the very last word on the page. The very last word is?

Mike: history.

Cooper: Click behind that word. Hit enter. And there you have page two. Okay, now select all, edit and now what are we doing?

Mike: Copy

Cooper: Right! To make sure we can move the curser down a few spaces in order to allow ourselves some more room. What do we select...

Mike: Copy, edit and then paste.

Cooper: Correct.

Cooper: And if you want to look at how it looks on a page, you can go to print preview. We pasted it on the same page, but part of it went to the first page. Do you want to leave it like that?

Mike: No.

Cooper: okay, let's change it. Close out on print preview. You want to move the text down. Click in front of the passage that you want to move. Now go to print preview. Look you have it all on the second page. Close the print preview and check you document. How do you know that the passage is now on the second page?

Mike: I don't see a page number?

Cooper: I don't know why your page numbers are not showing up, but to be sure scroll down and check. I don't know why your page numbers are not showing up...oh they are here is page 1.

In this example, Cooper walked her student through the steps of cutting and pasting.

As noted previously, Cooper rarely assumed that her students know basic Word processing skills. However, recognizing the importance of word processing skills, she spent time explaining to her student basic features of the program.

In this section I have attempted to show how Cooper uses computer technology, storytelling and individual instruction to aid her students in the writing process and the development of student voice. Additionally, recognizing that her students lacked basic word processing skills, Cooper exposed her students to critical computer technology skills. In the following section, I present how Cooper talked about her students' evolution throughout the process.

### *Transformations*

Transformation seemed to occur in two different ways: students began to trust their voice and they learned basic computer technology skills. In particular, I highlight how Cooper talked about the changes she saw in her students as the thematic unit evolved. I begin by presenting how Cooper observed the development of her students' voice and experiences throughout the course of the thematic unit. Following this example, I share how Cooper talked about the growth in her Black students' computer technology skill.

### Trusting one's voice

Cooper found that when the thematic unit began, her Black students had trouble expressing themselves. When pushed to explain their thoughts and ideas they often provided a one-word answer. Cooper also saw that her students would more often than not respond, "I don't know." However, as the unit progressed, Cooper discovered that her students became more comfortable with using their own voice. She shared,

They began to use their own language. Like some of them used slang—one student wrote about his hang out which is the "black pole." I thought it was a night club or something and he said, "no" its the Black pole right there...and he pointed outside. Getting to see their voices come through their writing, it was exciting.

Cooper encouraged her students to use their own language. In turn, she validated their experiences. As suggested by this quote, Cooper provided structures in her classroom that allowed her students to be free in their identity.

Cooper saw transformations occur in other ways. Students who rarely wrote prior to the thematic unit developed extensive autobiographical essays using the computer technology. Cooper expressed:

Lamont who had never written anything, suddenly has two pages. He may not have the conclusion and the development of pages, but he wrote, which is beyond what he has ever done before.

Multiple factors may have contributed to his ability to write. Lamont seemed to be greatly influenced by the pedagogical approach, the focus on autobiographical writing, the use computer technology or all of the above. Regardless, he excelled in this assignment. In the final analysis, a student who rarely wrote, for the first time in his life, articulated thoughts about himself on paper and articulated his reality.

I found that many of the students appeared to enjoy this assignment because it focused on their lives, experiences, and community. During the final presentation, Cooper asked students to share their thoughts about the autobiographical writing process. One student exclaimed, “I loved this assignment. It was about us!”

### Becoming computer literate

When they began this writing assignment, many of Cooper’s students did not know the basics of using Microsoft Word computer technology. Cooper pointed out:

There are a lot of basic skills that my students need to know. The applications that are used to retrieve information, how to do an Internet search—they may not be as keen on that unless they own a computer.

She further added:

Keyboarding is something that you would think all students would have [had] by the time they’re in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. That is an area where my students fall short. That is one of the challenges---they don’t have the basic skills.

Cooper, in response to this reality, demonstrated to her students how to compose an essay using word processing software. Throughout the writing process, she taught editing skills and other important features of Microsoft Word.

By focusing on word processing, I don’t underestimate what Cooper did. In essence, for her poor black students, many of whom did not have access to computer technology at home aside from a video game, school became the only site where her students could learn technological skills. Cooper taught them how to edit, spell check, grammar check, format, cut and paste and print preview, while developing their voice. These skills were the foundation for writing using computer technology.

*Summary*

Cooper's pedagogical philosophy was informed by her sense of activism and her personal commitment to create spaces for her Black students to name their realities and to become social agents for change in the Black community. Three themes best capture the essence of Cooper's teaching practice—a desire for social change, a focus on students' experiences and the development of student voice. The Internet and computer technology, therefore, became a tool to access information that would allow her students to think more critically about forms of racism as well as their personal responsibilities as members of a marginalized group. In addition, the Internet and computer related technology became a tool for adding her students' personal and cultural stories to the plethora of stories that exist about the Black experience. Thus, Cooper's *ngona* is not only about the development of much needed computer skills, but also about how computer technology aided her Black students in trusting their own voice.

In the following chapter, I focus on the *ngona* of Michael St. John who was deeply changed by his experiences as a child growing up in Guyana. In his counter narrative, I highlight how he used a software program, iMovie, digital cameras and videos to encourage the development of student voice in his class comprised entirely of all Black males class labeled “emotionally disturbed.”

## Chapter 8

### **Michael St. John: Somebody took their time with me---I want to give back.**

#### *Background*

Michael St. John was deeply influenced by his life experiences. He was born in the 1950's in Guyana, a society, he argued as built on a racial caste system. As a child, he noticed distinctions in the life chances of children based on race and class. He found the Guyanese educational system not only limited opportunities for poorer Black students, but more importantly stunted their educational growth and potential. By the age of sixteen, he actively committed his life towards working to challenge institutionalized structures such as the educational system. In his mind, the educational system represented a structure that disenfranchised many Black youth. As an adult, he did more than critique both the Guyanese and U.S. educational system for “disabling” Black students. He actively worked towards transforming the educational experience for those most marginalized by the educational system, Black, males labeled.

From my observations, I could tell that his experiences in Guyana developed in him a thirst to help others of African descent. These life experiences laid the groundwork for who he was to become, an “outspoken” crusader for justice for Black students. In this chapter, I demonstrate how St. John's life experience deeply influenced his teaching practice. In spaces where Black children were disregarded, St. John designed lessons utilizing computer technology in ways that provided authentic learning opportunities for those children he felt were most marginalized by the schools systems. In what follows, I share his ngona.

Viewed as an “intelligent” student by his teachers because of his exceptional achievement test scores, St. John was placed in high academic tracks throughout his schooling career. Consequently, teachers and administrators gave him access to the top schools in the city. For St. John, access to opportunity, denied to most of his classmates, opened his eyes to the way that a school system serves different purposes for diverse students. During one of our many conversations, he pushed up his glasses and in a quiet, barely audible tone told of the oppressive British system where he attained his elementary and secondary schooling. He frustratingly recalled in a strong Guyanese accent the way that teachers’ privileged students whom they deemed “smart,”

The educational system [in Guyana] is set up in this way...if they knew that you were easily teachable, the teachers worked with you. If you had difficulties, well hey--some of the students would go into industry, but most of the population was composed of laborers, field workers etc.

According to St. John, the “smarter” the student, the better the opportunities. As for those “less teachable,” they would be on the fast track into working in the field or the factory. St. John elaborated contemplatively that, in Guyana, the majority of poorer Black students were destined to a “life in the field.” I noticed that during this conversation, St. John emphasized the words “well hey” which, seemed to symbolize his critique of the complete disregard that both teachers and administrators held towards those Black students that they deemed non-teachable. St. John’s story about the educational process in Guyana also demonstrated the maintenance and pervasiveness of racism within the schooling institution. As a young, working class, male, St. John’s first memories of racism were central to his emerging philosophy as a teacher.

St. John recognized the contradictory nature of an educational system that served to benefit only a few. He observed that at an early age, judgments were made about the intelligence of some Black children that would, in turn, affect their life chances. These observations had a profound impact on how he viewed education and would come to motivate his commitment to social justice.

Even though St. John benefited from this educational system, he never disassociated himself with the Black community to which he belonged. These experiences as a child would deeply influence his decision to teach. In the years that followed, St. John personally committed his life to resisting the social order by transforming the life chances of those Black children and adults that were dismissed by the educational system.

### *The Merging of Identity and Pedagogy*

#### Observations as an Outsider/Within

At the age of sixteen, soon after high school graduation, St. John was hired as a manager in a sugar factory, an opportunity rarely given to young Black males. In this contradictory position, his experiences while serving as manager strengthened his understandings of the interconnections of race, class, education and their relationship to economic opportunity in the lives of Black children. On one level, as an insider, he worked within the company in a privileged position as part of the managerial staff. Working alongside Europeans and Indians, he developed a new angle of vision on how Blacks' subordinate position was maintained and reinforced in the work force.

His social location as a Black working class male deemed him as an outsider within this company dominated by white men.

St. John told the story of his immediate manager, Claude, an Indian man, coming to him in a fit of laughing hysteria. Claude shared with St. John that a 16-year old Black boy came to their factory looking for a job. The Black boy was illiterate. When asked to spell “school” the boy replied “d-o-o-e”.

Outraged that Claude found humor in the boy’s illiteracy, St. John thought to himself, “I went to school with Claude and I know he is truly a dummy...he got married to the daughter of one of the owners and that is how he got the job.” Much to the surprise of Claude, St. John responded, “send the boy to me and I will work with him.” With emotion he recalled how and why he committed his time to working with the young man. In the following excerpt, St. John shared his experiences teaching the young boy.

St. John: I started him with colors. Then I started teaching him [how to tell] time; this is 1:00; 2:00; 3:00; 4:00. I coded like that. I taught him things.

R: Why did you begin teaching him?

St. John: I think I was just mad. I was just mad. That was the first time that I became very angry at the educational system. It made a few, but destroyed many. So that is why I started working with him and he became pretty successful. He was reading all of those instruments. He was doing calculations. Eventually, within a year, he was calculating samples. He was reading sugar values. He was doing work in the lab. And it struck me that he had a disability. He was led to be disabled [by the educational system]. He wasn’t taught. So, it’s all about opportunities and as long as I’m around I’m going to give Black students an opportunity for them to learn.

Through this experience teaching the young Black man, St. John saw the real consequences of a schooling system that “destroyed many” Black students because

they were not taught basic reading and writing skills. As St. John noticed, educational attainment was not about skill or the ability to learn. In the Guyanese schooling system, Black students who did not “test well,” regardless of their intellectual ability, were led to be “disabled.” Simultaneously, as in the case with his manager, he observed that those individuals who had social connections in the community, albeit less qualified and less intelligent, not only received academic and economic opportunity, but were also placed in leadership positions. St. John observed individuals who held positions of power were rarely of African descent. It was during this life-changing episode that he committed himself to educating those Black students most affected by the dehumanizing and harmful effects of the school system.

In 1976, St. John left his job as a manager and decided to teach. This decision was more than a career change. Providing opportunities and experiences for Black people to think critically about their surroundings became a part of St. John’s identity. This decision to teach was influenced by his personal desire to provide opportunities and experiences for Black people to think critically about their surroundings.

By 1978, St. John had married his high school sweetheart. He recollected that although they were not making a lot of money they lived “in a large compound; the lawns were manicured and the servants would come in and cook.” However, within a few years, he moved his family to the U.S. to receive medical care not available in Guyana for their ailing daughter. Although he and his family were considered prosperous in Guyana, living as if they were ex-patriots, they sacrificed the material gain and prestige to seek medical attention for their daughter. Although she later

passed away, St. John's identity as a dedicated father and husband would be the same commitment that he would later bring to his classroom.

Believing that he could make a positive impact upon his students, St. John dedicated his life to serving those Black children most marginalized by the system. Throughout his teaching career, he served Black students, majority male and living in inner-urban environments who were diagnosed with learning disabilities at early ages. He began teaching in a private Christian school in New York, but shortly moved to Pathways, a school for severely, emotional-disturbed students. He became a personal advocate for Black children "diagnosed" as emotionally disturbed as illustrated in the following claim, "they are entitled to a life...they may not learn all of the content, but somebody has to help them to find themselves, to develop the skills to think and access services in the community; I don't want them to end up in jail."

St. John struggled internally with the idea that the masses of Black children were failing out of school or being sent to jail as a result of an inequitable system. He seemed to believe that these students, before entering school, were destined to fail. St. John countered this reality by conceiving of teaching as more than a job. Teaching became his life work and embodied a moral obligation to help the marginalized Black children displaced by the system. His teaching was not thought about as a sacrifice, but rather it became a personal commitment to utilize his "God-given" talents and resources to make a difference in a child's life.

In retrospect, St. John shared that his childhood and professional experiences in Guyana led him to believe that "no one gave them [black students] a chance, but also that the educational system in both the US and abroad worked toward "dis-

abling” Black students.” In other words, Black students, who did not test well, were not allowed to have the opportunity to learn basic reading and writing skills, much less, critical thinking skills. He observed and understood that society, in many cases, had low expectations of Black students. Simultaneously, he understood that people of African descent were survivors. In spite of the barriers and obstacles in place, there was hope. At the core of his philosophy was the belief that it was the Black community’s responsibility to educate Black children and no one else. More personally, he believed that the mission of teaching marginalized Black children was his responsibility. He often told me during one of our many conversations that “we should not expect another culture to educate our students.”

St. John’s experiences as an outsider/within not only provided him with insight into the inequitable process of the educational system and work force, but also instilled in him a desire to hold himself personally accountable to making positive change in the lives of the Black students, like himself, who were most affected. He held a level of critique of his oppressive conditions while at the same time he was motivated by a sense of social justice as transformational resistance (see Delgado, 2001). As a result of these life circumstances, St. John would eventually dedicate his life to teaching Black students most marginalized by the educational system.

#### Providing opportunities is my responsibility

While observing St. John at Clinton Diagnostic Center in 2003, I became enthralled by his knowledge, dedication and critical awareness of the unjust conditions of his students. St. John taught six, 11-year old, Black male students, diagnosed as “emotionally disturbed.” During one of our initial interviews, I began

the conversation by asking St. John to tell me a little about his students. He shared that they brought to school life experiences of “failure...mainly failure and the feeling that they are not able to do anything, they hold very, very negative concepts of themselves.” These students were “sent from their neighborhood schools and bused to Clinton Center because of their disruptive behaviors and a need to be placed in a therapeutic setting where they can receive counseling.” This response did not surprise me. I could tell from the way they held their heads and their body language that there was a sense of defeat. St. John taught in the only school in the Roosevelt City Public Schools designated for emotional disturbed/special education students. Not only were they marginalized in multiple ways as African American, male, poor and largely unsuccessful in the schooling process, but also they were marginalized based on geographic location. These Black students were ejected from their neighborhood school and placed in an isolated setting away from their neighborhood friends and community support. In this case, the schooling process and structure served to further debilitate these students and reaped havoc on their self-concept.

Disenchanted by their previous schooling experiences, many of St. John’s students became victims of “academic disidentification.” In other words, these students no longer felt uplifted by academic success or disheartened by academic failure (Osborne, 1997). These feelings also led to low self-concept. Rather than focusing on academics, St. John found that his students set their sights on professional sports. His students voice daily their desires be in the “pros.” As St. John shared, it is not uncommon for him to hear, “Look Mr. St. John, stop the bull. I know I will never make a hundred million dollars from what you are teaching me, but

if you put a ball in my hand, and allow me to practice, maybe I will make it to the NBA.” St. John sadly observed that as a result of malnutrition and poor health care, his students, physically, were not at a place where their dream to become professional basketball players could turn into a reality.

In addition to “academic disidentification,” prevailing stereotypes of Black boys as being unintelligent and genetically inferior further influenced his students’ feelings of low self-concept (Steele, 2003). It is not uncommon for school administrators and teachers to hold low expectations of their Black students. I recalled my own father sharing with me how he had to challenge the stereotype of being unintelligent because of his social location of being poor, Black and male and raised by a divorced mother. As a young man, about to graduate from an integrated high school in New Jersey, counselors urged him to become an “office boy” arguing that he would never be successful in college. He did go on to college and graduated in the top of his class. Although, he did not let others’ assumed stereotypes threaten his life chances, for many vulnerable, Black students, stereotype threats and low-expectations have detrimental effects.

Through his teaching, St. John countered interpersonal, social and environmental realities by placing the onus on himself to make a difference in his students’ lives. He expressed, “...you have to give them a chance and give them an opportunity to see beyond their old house, their rotten floors, their missing fathers, missing moms, somebody drunk, you know?” St. John responded to his students’ low self-concept by inviting their social realities and experiences into the classroom and

into his curriculum. Most importantly, he taught his students important lessons about ways that they could deal with and negotiate society as young Black boys.

To explain, I observed St. John talking to his students about life in jail. This conversation is relevant because the Justice Department found that an estimated 12 percent of Black men ages 20-34 are incarcerated; by comparison, 1.6 percent of white men in the same age group are in prison (April 7, 2003, New York Times). St. John demystifies prison for his young Black male students,

St. John: When you understand what it is like to be locked up, someone tells you when to get up, when to go to the bathroom, when to eat and when to sleep...it's not fun. That is not what life is about. If you were meant to be locked up in a cell in a cage, you would have been born a wild animal...you would have been up in a zoo in a cage. Think about that. That is why you need an education.

St. John imparted a strategic education based on his belief that meaningful and realistic instruction provided his students with the ability to make informed choices. He recognized, understood and empathized with his students who did not view education as a viable possibility. At the same time, he was analytic about the systematic threats that occurred daily that reminded his Black students that jail is a likely possibility. St. John recognized that on too many occasions his students observed friends, family and neighbors being sent to jail. In a sense, jail became a destination for his students. However, St. John utilized classroom time to address the realities and consequences of being in jail. He debunked notions that being in jail is “cool” and a necessary “rite of passage.” Instead, he posited that losing one’s rights and ability to make choices is inhumane.

Black teachers utilizing the schooling site to strategically teach their Black students how to negotiate U.S. society is not uncommon. Emilie Walker, in her

revisionist account of Caswell Training School, a school that existed during the Jim Crow era, found that teachers were committed to imparting a political education in addition to the basic skills. Black teachers taught important life lessons within these all Black classrooms. Like St. John, these transformative teachers held high expectations for their Black students and of the educational process. In both cases, teachers underscored the importance of education as a means to move beyond their circumstances. What is the purpose of education? To what end? And, what does it mean to educate a Black child in a racist society became important questions.

### *The Merging of Identity and Pedagogy*

St. John was deeply committed to his Black students. Like many Black teachers past and present, he worked within schooling institutions that reified and perpetuated the marginalization of Black students. In spite of this reality, St. John lived within this contradiction by proactively providing for his students meaningful educational opportunities that allowed them to grow.

I observed that St. John assumed the role of a fictive father. Hill-Collins (1990) refers to “other mothers” as women who assist blood mothers by sharing parental responsibilities. In the same vein, “fictive fathers” serve the same purpose. They assume the role of father while the student is in their care. Based on his life experiences and teaching philosophy, I was not surprised to find that St. John sacrificed his time or money in order to provide for his students in ways that affected his biological family. He shared with me the story of his beloved wife playfully commenting while removing several old computers from her kitchen table that St. John had placed there in the process of repairing the computers. She said, “I can

compete with other women, no problem, but I can not compete with these kids.”

Although said in a joking fashion, her comment revealed the blurring of St. John’s professional and personal life. For him, the two were inseparable. His students represented an extension of his biological family.

For example, recognizing that Roosevelt City Public Schools did little to support Clinton Diagnostic Center, St. John made it his responsibility to provide resources for his students. Whatever he bought for his son, Adam, he would buy for his students. He shared, “what I do at home is a reflection of what I do at school and vice versa. I live my life believing that each day someone should benefit from something that I have done.” Every weekend, St. John ventured to the surrounding suburbs in search of yard sales and thrift stores to purchase software, books, and other necessary resources so that his students could have the same opportunities as Adam.

I would go to the library in Elizabeth County to buy books that are disregarded...Caucasian parents buy books for their kids and read the book a couple of times and then give it to the library. I go there and buy books for 24 cents and I bring them to the classroom. These kids treat the books like gold because they have never seen them before.

For St. John, spending weekends seeking out second-hand resources for his students was not a sacrifice; rather, it represented his identity as a teacher personally committed to the education of his students. St. John’s role as a father to his biological son transferred to the classroom. He served as a symbolic father for his students at Clinton. As such, he became a provider of opportunities for his students.

In other ways, his life experiences and identity, alongside his insights about the schooling process, informed his pedagogical approach. He believed that his students were diverse, therefore teaching must be designed to meet each child's individual needs. For St. John, teaching transcended scripted lessons, pacing charts and standardized testing. He believed that Roosevelt City Public Schools did not allow for this kind of flexibility. During an interview, he presented this hypothetical situation. "If I start teaching the weather and a child says...you know you are speaking about water and rain etc. Really, what is water? Now that is chemistry. Now, I must stop and say okay we cannot discuss that because we must stick with water?" St. John raised an important point. As a teacher in Roosevelt City Public Schools, he was forced to make choices about his students' learning. On the one hand, his students could be penalized as a result of the inflexibility of the state-mandated material. On the other hand, engaging his students' interest was important to his philosophy about learning. In the end, St. John chose to follow his instincts and fully address his students' questions and concerns.

St. John's understood teaching to be rooted in the lives and experiences of his students. Knowledge, in this case, was socially constructed and not limited by the district-mandated curriculum. At the same time, St. John constructed meaningful education to mean inviting his students' questions, comments and concerns into the curriculum. In essence, St. John challenged policy and district mandates that suggested, implicitly, that all children learn the same and come to school with the same kinds of experiences. Instead, St. John debunked what he referred to as the "robotic" nature of teaching arguing that humanlike qualities of care, teachable

moments and flexibility were necessary dispositions that should not be replaced. St. John intuitively made choices that best fit the personal and cultural needs of his students. When working with kids who lived with a certain amount of inconsistency, a teaching script could not account for the everyday realities of these students' lives. He was ready to seize any teachable moment as an opportunity to educate.

Perhaps one of the most vibrant illustrations of his pedagogical philosophy occurred when I asked St. John why he never used textbooks. He responded:

I DON'T NEED A TEXTBOOK! Each child is a textbook. A child is a textbook because he has experiences...and that child can teach you the same things that you learn in a book. That child is an author!...So who has got the knowledge, they have the knowledge, I have to tap the knowledge from them.

St. John, in the same vein as transformative Black teachers of the past, affirmed and validated the experiences of his Black students even if that meant designing alternative curriculum that best met their needs. On one level, it could be argued that St. John performed a disservice to his students by marginalizing the state-mandated textbooks, which, in essence, could be viewed as providing access to the "culture of power." However, St. John did not abandon the district-mandated standards, rather, he utilized alternative forms of texts, intertwined with his students' life experiences, to meet school requirements.

From a different perspective, St. John transformed the way knowledge and knowledge construction was viewed in the classroom. Within a schooling institution that utilized culturally irrelevant textbooks that marginalized or eliminated his Black's students' lives, histories and experiences, St. John countered this reality by embracing his student's knowledge base and using it as a point of departure for designing the curriculum. Theorists, such as Ladson-Billings (1994), define

culturally-relevant conceptions of knowledge as “continuously re-created, recycled and shared by teachers and students. It is not static or unchanging.” (p. 81). In St. John’s class, knowledge construction transcended commonly held notions of culturally-relevant teaching. St. John provided a space where students positioned themselves as the subjects of the curriculum as opposed to the objects. He built connections between his students and their community. The text in the classroom was transformed to include the “text” of his students’ lives. In turn, St. John invited his students to be agents of knowledge construction in their classroom.

Like Kofi and Jones, St. John’s life experiences influenced his desire to teach. Principles learned while working with low-skilled Black workers in Guyana informed his beliefs about teaching and learning. He stubbornly refused to buy into the commonly held notion that teaching for poor, Black children was about acquiring the basic skills to “survive” in American society. One time he said,

Surviving is okay. I don’t have to bathe if I don’t stink. There is basic survival, just like the animal, the wild animal. I will hunt when I’m hungry and I will chase you away if I feel threatened. But living is when you start enjoying what you have around you, start to enjoy your environment.

Too much of our society is at that level and it makes no sense. That is the difference. Now for our students, survival means to do enough work to get the teacher off your back or to get the mother off your back or not ending up in the principal’s office. But you know, when you start to live and to enjoy education, then you’re excited about learning.

As St. John revealed, teaching meant nurturing spaces for his Black students to grow and to learn. He believed that his teaching must lead to opportunities in which his Black students feel and believe that they can experience a high quality of life. From

our conversations, I gathered that a high quality of life would transcend the intellectual realm to include the mental, physical and spiritual realm.

Many of these ideas about teaching and learning emerged from his experiences in Guyana working as a manager in the factory. As a child, in Guyana, St. John witnessed Black men and women groomed to behave in “robotic” ways. St. John believed that these individuals were denied a “quality of life.” For St. John, a quality of life represented the ability to make conscious choices and to develop critical thinking skills. He recollected,

There was a man who worked in a power plant with a million dollars worth of equipment. He had to work with different alternators and generators. He knew that when the temperature went up, he had to turn the machine on. But he never knew why. He had been doing this job for years. A robot is going to know that if the temperature is 60 degrees, then you are going to push this button.

So I started to teach the men working in the factory who were over 60 years old; I explained why he had to push this button at this temperature...why this way and not that. I explained why the machine shut down. And, then I started teaching these guys waves. We synchronized waves so that they would actually match completely one or the other. And they were so excited about learning we started to have classes in the factories. They would come into my office and we would actually hold class in my office.

St. John provided an opportunity for these elderly Black men to transcend their role as “button pusher” in the factory. Knowing that these Black men were working far below their capabilities, St. John took advantage of their desire to know more to teach them complicated engineering principles. In addition, he revealed the possible debilitating effects of racism on the lives of these Black, male factory workers. As St. John noticed, these men spent the majority of their lives rotely performing tasks without having a clear sense of the inner working of the machinery. At the same

time, they were placed in subordinate positions without the possibility of upward mobility. St. John found this practice illogical. This factory system perpetuated and maintained low status positions for these Black. St. John provided an opportunity for these men to professionally grow and to learn using a context that was familiar to them, their work space.

*Perspectives of the Internet and Computer-Related Technologies*

In St. John's current classroom, his teaching practice was no different. He challenged his students by providing opportunities for them to learn in ways that were personally relevant. Computer games such as Game Boy and X Box engaged his students' interest. St. John spent time observing his students' interactions while using the computer technology. He noticed that they remained on the computers for hours. Although reading on a first or second grade level, they developed a deep understanding of the computerized game directions, mastering the sophisticated skills necessary to compete with other players.

Honing in on his students' interest, he exploited his students' love of computer technology and found ways to integrate this engagement into his learning activities. St. John discovered that the graphics combined with the sound held his students' interest. Graphics and sound reinforced the text making the content material more comprehensible for his students, who, had problems concentrating for long periods of time. In addition, the computer screen and keyboard provided a familiar interface and format by which his students could refer to since they were accustomed to digital games. He also found that his students' positive attitudes

towards technology outside of school transferred to their feelings towards computer technology in the classroom. He observed:

The computer is not going to tell them that they are wrong...voices for a lot of these kids can be negative. Voices have been telling them all of the time that you can't make it; you're wrong; you're good for nothing. They may not hear it in the classroom, but they hear it out on the street. But it's still the voice that they are hearing. The computer does not do that. And, they get excited over that. Nobody is bombarding them when they use the technology.

Here, St. John spoke to the relationship that his students developed with the computer. St. John's observations exposed the reality that if his students relied on their natural environment they would never receive affirmation. On another level, St. John revealed that while using computer technology, the student possesses control over his environment. Rarely do his students have the opportunity to experience power and autonomy in most areas of their life. Here, his students tell the computer what to do; the computer becomes humanized because it is an entity that the students can relate to. In other words, the computer became a safe space where his students developed their own expectations.

He took advantage of his students' excitement of computers and used it as a medium to engage them in various learning activities.

I purposefully constructed lessons using computer technology. Although they learned a new skill, they were able to rely on technology skills that they learned through playing video games. Since they had the freedom to explore while using the computer technology, they set their own standards. No one imposed a standard on them. Therefore the possibilities were unlimited for them. They were familiar with the computer technology and they developed their own expectations.

As evidenced by this quote, it seems that there was a marriage of opportunity and convenience. St. John maximized his students' innate interest in computer technology. I noticed that throughout the thematic unit, students without realizing it gained important technological skills and knowledge that could be used throughout life.

In practice, St. John actively encouraged his students to transfer the concentration needed to master computer games to other areas of their life. He recalled a conversation with one of his students. Marcus was sitting at a computer station working on an activity. St. John stated, "you know man, you were at that computer for thirty minutes doing an activity. If you can sit at the computer doing that then I know you can sit and do this biology with me." Knowing that Marcus was a student that was easily distracted, St. John underscored his students' ability to remain focused for a long period of time and attempted to help Marcus transmit these skills to other aspects of his life.

Like Jones, St. John personally benefited from the use of computer technology in his daily life and believed that his students' lives could be transformed. He desired for the computer to become ubiquitous to his students daily existence beyond that of video games. He shared:

It will take me eight hours to copy some information by hand, but if I can get on the Internet and download in five minutes. That is a big difference and that is what I am trying to get into my students.

St. John recognized that for his Black students, who were highly marginalized by society, computer technology could ameliorate their daily living. At the same time, he wanted his students to have the same opportunities as their counterparts who did

not face stereotype threat. He asserted that, “they need to have a chance when they meet the students in college. They need thinking skills; they need to be able to deal with computers. They need access to information.” St. John believed that in the technological age, his students must have computer skills in order to meet the demands of the workforce. More importantly, St. John saw it as his responsibility to expose his students to critical computer technology skills. In this way, his students could choose to integrate computer technology in their life.

*The Thematic Unit: Producing an iMovie about “Things That Move”*

Description

St. John designed an interdisciplinary, student-centered thematic unit based on the concept, “things that moved.” In the past, he found that the theme, “things that moved” held his students’ interest and often became the thrust of many previous class discussions. Knowing that “things that moved” represented a high interest area for his students, he focused multiple lessons as well as a digital project around the theme.

The unit was composed of several interactive activities interspersed across a four-month period. As part of his teaching practice, St. John’s students learned about how inanimate objects such as cars, robots and rockets moved. They also gained knowledge of the inner workings of bodily functions such as the movement within the heart and excretion. Since St. John’s teaching practice seemed propelled by students’ interest and questions, all topics and all discipline areas could become a potential source for a lesson. It was not uncommon for St. John to take students outside on an expedition to observe how birds move or to spend thirty minutes on a mathematical

problem that focused on the movement of a train. During the period that I observed St. John's self-contained classroom, he attempted to conform all of his discussions around the theme.

Every Tuesday and Wednesday, St. John and his students spent time in the computer laboratory to research their topic using the Internet and produce iMovies about "things that move." iMovie is a software application that is part of the Macintosh computer. iMovie permits its user to arrange video clips to tell a story. The iMovie can potentially resemble an authentic production with transitions such as fade in/fade out. In addition, music can be added to create the feel of a music video.

St. John's students choose a topic to research such as cars, trucks, humans etc. Trusting that his students could handle the \$1000 dollar equipment, St. John assigned each student to an iBook, Macintosh lap top computer for their personal use throughout the unit. Each student was held responsible for saving his work and making sure the lap top was properly handled. While in the computer lab, students had complete freedom to construct, design and create. I rarely witnessed whole class instruction. If a question arose, St. Johns' students would work to resolve the issue independently with St. John or Reed<sup>18</sup>.

Throughout the semester, students had the opportunity to videotape different school performances. St. John also allowed ample occasions for his students to utilize the digital video camera to capture their topic on tape. The video was streamed into their computer to be used for the I movie production.

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<sup>18</sup> Reed is the technology coordinator. She ran the computer lab and worked alongside St. John while assisting his students while they worked on producing their movies through Imovie.

Like Jones' Amistad thematic unit, I found St. John's teaching practice, during the "things that moved" thematic unit, complex and difficult to capture. St. John spoke about the messiness of his teaching practice,

My lessons are always in motion. Because although I have a basic plan of what I want to do the methods keep changing and I also have to remember that I have to adapt to suit the students and they do not come in every day the same way. So I do have to be aware of that when I plan. So I'm always changing, I'm always reinventing the wheel...nothing around here is static.

I'm looking at ways to make connections. I don't like to do things in isolation. I remember my days in schools and you sit there and add/subtract and add/subtract and no one is really adding and subtracting. If I find a way then to say here's a basketball score I will incorporate some of that because that is where the interest is and that could be the springboard into the lesson and into what I want to do. The whole concept is not to teach because you have a plan but to teach because you want them to learn. There's a difference.

As St. John pointed out, he wanted his Black students to have authentic learning experiences. In his opinion, meaningful lessons and units must be built on authentic connections between his students' lives and the curriculum.

On the surface, his group seemed homogeneous; he taught poor, Black male students diagnosed as "emotionally disturbed." However, St. John recognized the spectrum of difference within his class. Each of his students came to school with a different set of experiences, a different knowledge base and different patterns of learning. St. John transformed his practice to meet each student personal needs.

Understanding the need for his students to "experience" learning, he took advantage of the school and community environment and used it as a second teacher. He often expressed, "I want my students to learn through living the experience." Throughout the thematic unit, the lessons that I observed appeared organic, fluid and filled with spontaneous opportunities for his students to think, question and problem

solve. His students would venture outside the school to explore nature, to talk to different individuals and to observe their surroundings.

In the following pages, I will discuss St. John's classroom practice. With each illustration, I will attempt to demonstrate St. John's personally relevant teaching practice—by way of interview and classroom observations. Rather than attempting to show St. John's complete teaching practice over the course of the thematic unit, I will highlight selected examples that I believe best illuminate how his teaching philosophy is lived out through practice. Then, I will share how the unit, "things that move", came alive for his students in the computer lab as they designed their Imovie.

St. John fundamentally believed that knowledge is an evolutionary process. By beginning with his students' knowledge base, St. John spent the first part of the unit fleshing out what his students already knew about "things that moved." St. John drew a chart and wrote on the blackboard the following words: **object, power source, mode of control, mode of movement and propelled by...** Knowing how eager his students were to physically move around the classroom, St. John asked them to think about a "thing that moved" and then come up to the board to complete the chart. His students shook with excitement at the opportunity to come up to the board and demonstrate their knowledge. One by one, each student took advantage of the opportunity to come to the board to write their object of preference. St. John's students constructed the following chart:

**Table 7.1: Things that move brainstorming activity**

Object	Power Source	Mode of Control	Mode of Movement	Propelled by...
Car	Gasoline	External	Rolls on wheels	Engine
Sports Utility	Gasoline	External	Rolls on wheels	Engine
Animal	Food	External	Limbs	
Computer	Motherboard	External		
Airplane	Air	External		Engine
Human	Food	External	Walk	Muscles
Bike	Feet	External	Rolls on wheels	Muscle
Robot		External	Power	Engine
Rocket	Fuel	External	Power	Engine
Truck	Gas	External	Rolls on wheels	Engine

When mistakes occurred, and they did, St. John redirected the conversation, raising questions that placed the student on the right path. To illustrate,

St. John: What is the mode of control for a car?  
 Jeremy: Internal  
 St. John: Can the car drive itself  
 Students: No  
 St. John: How does the car move?  
 Jeremy: We drive the car.  
 St. John: What is the mode of control for the car, then?  
 Students: External

Two things happened as a result of this learning activity that enabled St. John to plan the thematic unit to meet his students' personal needs. First, St. John focused the unit based on the students' "objects" of interest as identified in the chart. In the following

months, St. John and his students would explore objects such as cars, animals, robots and rockets. Second, St. John assessed his students' knowledge based on the way they constructed the chart. By beginning with what his students knew, St. John demonstrated that he valued their knowledge and experiences. Prior knowledge, then, served as the most important building block in developing his curriculum.

As part of his past experience working as a manager and an unofficial teacher in the Guyanese factory, St. John discovered that the learning process can be facilitated by breaking down difficult concepts to its simplest element. St. John found that this process, in turn, fostered a space where the learner became more confident in asking questions. St. John transferred these ideas about teaching to his current classroom practice. For instance, St. John explained how cars and trucks moved by examining how a motor functions.

On one cold February morning, St. John and his students ventured outside strapped with a digital video camera in order to learn about and record the movement of motors in both a car and SUV. Instruction during this lesson on motors was two fold. First, St. John probed his students to be sure they understood how to work and handle the digital video equipment.

Do you remember how to turn the camera on?  
Students: Yes! (students demonstrated how to turn the cameras on)  
Where is the record button?  
Students pointed the record button out.  
How do you zoom?  
Students demonstrated to St. John how to zoom.

Afterward, St. John launched into the second part of his instruction, an interactive mini-lesson on how motors worked. In this excerpt, St. John defined the parts and

demonstrated how each mechanism in the motor is connected. Part of his instruction was call and response, at other times, he engaged his students in conversation.

During the discussion, he pointed out and demonstrated how each mechanism works.

Students were free to touch and explore the motor. Over the roar of the running

engine, St. John shared:

St. John: This car has been around well over 200 thousand miles. Right? So the engine is not as smooth as others. What you have here is the body of the engine and you have the rooter, the fuel injector, and the batteries. This is the alternator this is the compressor for the AC system. Break fluid, steering fluid water fluid, radiator

Student: Where is your oil fluid? The oil looks dirty.

St John: The oil is not dirty, you check your oil at the bottom (he demonstrates how to check the oil). This oil is not dirty, but do you remember what I said about how many miles?

Students: 200

St. John: The transmission is on that side. How does the car move?

Students: It moves by engine.

St. John: The engine uses what sort of fuel?

Students: Gasoline

St. John: Okay the car uses gasoline...any other kind of fluids?

Student: Oil

St. John: Okay why does the car need oil? You need oil for what? If you have parts rubbing together what do you need for the oil to do?

Student: Keep the parts from burning

St. John: The term is lubrication. You need lubrication to keep the parts from burning. You need lubrication so that the engine will not grind and bind together. That is why oil is very slippery. I tried to keep this engine very clean so that if it has any leaks, I can observe it. It needs water to cool it down and this water is called anti-freeze. Water is going to freeze, but antifreeze is a special kind of liquid and it will not freeze. This is the radiator it is under pressure. Water goes into the engine through a pump, and comes out through the bottom and it is cooled down. And this is basically how it works, okay? What you are looking at is the fuses that control the electricity. That thing is the starter, used to start the engine over. When the engine starts over, it draws fuel in...into the injector. (his voice is clear and loud as he explains how the engine works over the noise of the engine running.). If you remove the cap, listen to what will happen...(engine gets lower) if you remove the cap, the engine will not function properly. If you put it back on, it balances it again.

This discussion continued as students raised questions and expressed their opinions about how motors operated. Throughout the conversation, St. John prodded his students to build logical connections between each mechanism and their function in the larger process. Afterward, St. John provided an opportunity for his students to explore the parking lot. Students videotaped different makes and models of cars to be used later in their iMovie.

I highlight this conversation for a number of reasons. First, St. John attempted to provide a realistic opportunity for his students to learn about how cars moved and more specifically, motors. As opposed to reading about this concept in a book, his students lived the experience. Second, by explaining the different components of a motor and how the car moved, St. John exposed his students to a necessary knowledge base. As St. John noted during a conversation, many of his students knew very little about the inner workings of a car, much less how to open the hood, change the oil, or pump gas because no one has taught them. Knowledge that many adults and children take for granted, is not a given for his Black male students. Therefore, he provided opportunities for his students to become exposed to a different knowledge base.

St. John personally connected the “things that move” unit to his students’ lives in ways that allowed them to make better life choices. In this lesson about the heart, St. John incorporated timely instruction about nutrition and healthy eating habits for people of African descents. This pedagogical practice reminded me of his constant mantra, “you have to give these students a chance.” In the following page, I will illuminate his practice on how humans move; on this particular day, the focus was on

the heart. St. John made this lesson practical, fun and yet he addressed critical issues concerning health in the Black community.

On this day, I walked into St. John's classroom and students were learning about the heart and heart rates. St. John reached into his closet and pulled out several stethoscopes. He threw stethoscopes at three of his students and said excitedly, "break into pairs." He stood in front of the class and explained to his students how to use a stethoscope. He shouts, "place the stethoscope over your students' heart." "Lub dub is the sound that you hear when the heart beats." Each student listened for their partners' heart rate for 30 seconds.

Shortly thereafter, St. John says in a loud voice, "Line up!" Students leapt from their seats and headed to the door. "Where are we going Mr. St. John?" St. John points to the hallway and says, "Line up, your job is to run the length of the hallway as fast as you can." His students tittered with excitement. When students were ready, St. John yelled "go!" and his students ran. Teachers and students from other classrooms poked their head outside their doors to identify the source of the commotion. St. John encouraged his students, "Keep running, You can do it!" For the few stragglers that became tired towards the end, St. John jogged with them, constantly encouraging them. Students returned to their seats, exhausted from the activity. Again, St. John asked his students to listen for each other's heart rate.

St. John: What do you hear?

Student: Your heart is pumping loud!

Students embarked on a long conversation about why their heart rate increased after the run.

Next, in order to make this activity more authentic, St. John presented a hydraulic pump, which symbolized the heart, and a blue tub filled with water to depict how blood moves through the heart. He demonstrated to the class how the heart and blood vessels work. St. John and his students worked together to build the pump. He modeled how the heart functioned while at rest and after running. Afterward, he purposely unattached certain tubes so that his students could hypothesize about why the heart failed to work. By physically demonstrating how the heart worked, I noticed that, once again, St. John broke the concept into its simplest explanation, in turn, making it real and concrete for his students.

As part of the lesson, St. John focused on heart disease in the Black community. He demonstrated that when the tubes became filled with cholesterol, the blood could not pass through which, in turn, leads to a heart attack. The conversation became intense as students began to talk about their parents' and grandparents' physical ailments as well as the kinds of foods they ate in their household. St. John took advantage of the opportunity to talk about nutrition, drug use, eating habits and demonstrated the process of a cardiac arrest.

In the previous examples, I attempted to uncover how St. John engaged his students in learning about “things that moved.” He attempted to make learning realistic and authentic by providing real, concrete experiences. He also wanted his students to think critically about different process and their surroundings. Finally, his students learned more than basic skills about the functions and process of certain objects. He encouraged his students to make better choices that would enhance not only their lives, but also the lives of their community.

### Transformative Pedagogy Using the Internet and Computer-Related Technologies

As mentioned earlier, on Tuesdays and Wednesdays his students ventured into the computer lab to design an iMovie based on “things that move.” St. John used computer technology as a mechanism for getting his students excited about learning. His students worked independently while in the computer lab. St. John gave them the freedom to explore, construct and create. On occasion, St. John and Reed helped his students resolve a technical issue, however, for the most part, they wrestled with difficult issues by themselves or with the assistance of a classmate.

In this section, I highlight specific examples of St. John’s teaching practice within the context of the computer lab. In this context, St. John, served as a tutor as opposed to a facilitator, offering individualized instruction to students who required technological assistance. St. John’s objectives for the “things that move” assignment in the computer lab was three-fold. Students researched the concept of their choice, they streamed the film they captured about “things that moved” into their iMovie and they constructed the movie, replete with audio.

In the following example, I highlight Thomas’ experience working individually with St. John. Although, St. John instructed Thomas on how to conduct research on the Internet, the deeper lessons occurred while St. John taught him the important lesson of patience and perseverance. In the following illustration, Thomas surfed the Internet looking for information on rockets.

St. John: If we try, okay it’s still loading. If we try a particular website and their information is not all that great, we just move on to another to see exactly what we have. See what it says here, “Welcome to Rocket City. Riders must step inside the elevator to explore different levels of flight.” I

guess this program is going to take you through a simulation of a Level III rocket. So we are going from I to Level III as soon as this finishes loading. So we want to move to Level III where there are rockets and then explore. But it is slow, it's eating up quite a bit of time, but be patient.

On the surface, St. John demonstrated to Thomas the art of fine-tuning a search on the Internet. As St. John noted, at times it is possible to find all of the information you need in a website, at others, it is about trial and error. He also provided warning to his student that not all websites are worthwhile or relevant. On a deeper level, St. John taught his student about patience. He explained why the computer process was slow and gently reminded his student that it is important to wait. Here, he contextualized the process of using computer technology so that his student did not become frustrated.

I also observed interactions where St. John taught his student how to save images and information collected from the Internet to a student folder. The expectation was that the student would then assist a classmate in the same process. St. John slowly and systematically took his student, Jeremy, through the "saving" process.

St. John: Try to import some of this. (He walks the students through the necessary steps). That's the thing about importing, some of this information you can download in the file, save it and then you will be able to import that into your iMovie. So now you have to see what they say about saving information... this is called down loading. You would create a file, you download it into the file, we have to give it your name, right? Then, later you will be able to extract information from that file and import it into your iMovie part and then that would become part of your iMovie album vehicle. Do you remember how to do this in case one of your classmates has a question?

*Jeremy demonstrates the process.*

St. John: Good!

When a student came to St. John with the same question, he would point them to the student who just learned the process. In this way, St. John taught the technical skill of importing while simultaneously building a learning community. He strove to foster the kind of social interaction in the classroom that supported individual and collective learning within a group context.

At one point St. John's students wanted to add music. St. John, not knowing the procedure, could not aid them in the process. He did, however, assert one rule—students must not use any information with lyrics. St. John's students went on-line and identified music that they desired to use as part of their video. Realizing that they could not stream music directly into the iMovie, his students independently began to experiment with ways to include music in their video.

Marcus figured out the concept. By playing the music through the computer speakers and then hitting the record button, he could capture the music. This required that all background noise in the classroom cease. St. John, Reed and I, watched as each student hushed each other while they took turns recording music into their movies. *In da club*, *Fifty Cents* and *Fabulous*, Jaheim became the songs of choice. One student, Anthony, decided to create his own rhythms and rapped background music to his video. St. John made an exception for Anthony's use of words explaining that rap was how Anthony expressed himself.

In the end, Marcus's iMovie on "things that moved" included the video of African dancers, the car motor, images of different cars. Each scene faded in and out. In addition, Marcus streamed the instrumental version of *In Da Club* by Fifty Cent to complete the video.

*Transformations*

Throughout the four months of observing St. John's classroom practice using computer technology, I noticed that learning seemed to come alive for his students. Students seemed to be excited about the thematic unit "things that move." St. John remarked that as a result of the unit his students "had to think for themselves. They had to work it out. They had to figure out how to match things, how to move." This comment was later affirmed by one of his students, James, who was amazed at his own success at creating an iMovie. He shared his feelings about the project. "I never thought I could do this...use the video camera and create movies. It was fun. Mr. St. John made this fun. I learned different techniques." Here, James seemed to recognize that he had the capability of doing more than he imagined. Having experienced success, he seemed to feel a sense of accomplishment about the knowledge he gained and the project he produced.

St. John continued to comment on how he used computer technology in ways that fostered independence in his students. He expressed:

These kids were handling thousand dollar equipment. They had cameras, they were going outside. They were filming things they wanted filmed. The technology made a difference. We didn't stay in the room and just think about the way things moved and looked in a textbook, we went out and did it for ourselves. They choose what they wanted. They chose the form of movement they wanted.

In a sense, St. John encouraged independent thinking and creativity.

In addition to providing opportunities for his students to become self-starters, I noticed St. John's students, who were normally at odds, worked together to assume the roles of teacher and technological advisor. I recalled in the beginning of January

observing a math lesson that focused on algebra. Towards the end of the lesson, the students were told to line up to go to lunch. As the students took their place by the door, there was a lot of pushing which eventually led to a fistfight. I later learned that St. John attributed this behavior and aggression to his students' frustration and lack of ability to articulate themselves. In other words, his students were frustrated with their lack of success in solving the mathematical equations, therefore they took their aggression out on each other. However, while observing in the computer laboratory, I noticed St. John's students working together and helping each other with technology issues. Much like the aforementioned example in which students assisted each other in adding music to their videos, St. John's students actively assisted each other in the production of their individualized movies. For example, one day I walked into the computer room to find students working contently on their iMovie projects. Darrel leaned over and gently demonstrated how to add transitional statements to James' iMovie. This was not an uncommon occurrence. Several times throughout observations, students would ask their peers for assistance before asking St. John.

I also noticed that students began to express their voice. For instance, Darrell, an eleven-year old student in St. John's class, had a particular troubling educational history. He was reading on the first grade level and had experienced extreme failure throughout his schooling experience. Sent to Clinton Middle School, he often found himself alone or the target of endless verbal abuse by his classmates.

While in the computer lab, Darrell researched humans. As part of his iMovie, Darrel included video of the African dancers, including transitions. I noticed that he spent most of his time recording his self-created rap lyrics into the iMovie video as

background music. Toward the end of the project, Darrel shared with me, in a mature, serious manner, that this project gave him a sense of accomplishment. “The iMovie allowed me to express myself.” Later, St. John further explained Darrell’s comment by adding:

...this project gave him an opportunity to express himself within his disabilities. He has trouble reading and writing, he rarely finds success in “traditional” assignments. However, this project allowed him to construct and create. It also allowed him to utilize his talent of rapping. His product was as good as his peers.

St. John wanted his students to name and trust their own realities. The computer technology became a vehicle in which students could find a mode to express themselves. For Darrel, this technology project allowed him to feel successful in a space where he normally finds little success.

### *Summary*

St. John had strong beliefs about the purposes of education for Black children. Principles learned while working in Guyana informed his beliefs about teaching. As evidenced in the ngona, St. John’s critique of the educational system parallels, in many ways, Bowles and Gintis (1976) analysis of schooling which reminds us of the social reproduction model rooted in Marxist and neo-Marxist critiques. The social reproduction model begins with the assumption that socializing agents such as schools, reproduce, reinforce and legitimize the hierarchical workforce by socializing those matriculating through schools to *take* and *accept* their place in the workforce (Solorenzo, 1995). In other words, the economic [and racist] conditions of the society drive the structure of the educational setting. However, St. John demonstrated a sense

of agency as well as a personal desire to make change for himself and for his Black students in urban schools.

He refused to buy into the commonly held belief that teaching for poor, Black children was about acquiring the basic skills to “survive” in American society. Survival in this case would mean acquiring basic reading and writing skills and maintaining a minimum wage job, rather the key for his students is exposure and the ability to live a higher quality of life.

St. John’s teaching practices and philosophy came about as a result of his life experiences. He saw himself as a fictive-father, loving his students, pushing them, scolding them and nurturing them. Furthermore, he fostered a classroom environment where he broke complex ideas down into small components. He allowed students to begin their own questioning process. Finally, his students learned to question their own surroundings.

Additionally, St. John thought of computer technology as a form of currency. He exposed his students to what he deemed as necessary educational tools such as the Internet, software programs, digital cameras and camcorders, in order to give them the same opportunities as their peers in neighboring schools and school districts. His motivations for teaching, his strong Black consciousness and his desire to counter inequity became the foundation of teaching practices. Thus, this ngona sheds light on ways that computer technology can be used to embrace Black students’ knowledge and experiences.

The following chapter addresses interpretation and conclusions. I cull the teaching practices of these transformative teachers as a way to think about the

intersection between culturally-relevant teaching and good uses of computer technology. I will close with recommendations for culturally-relevant teaching practices using computer technology in urban schools.

## Chapter 9

### Interpretations, Implications, Conclusions

In the last four chapters, I examined the lives and teaching practices of four transformative Black teachers who utilized computer technology as a liberatory tool in urban classrooms. This chapter focuses on the culturally-relevant uses of computer technology, a concept that seems to have been deemphasized in theories of computer integration in instruction. I found that larger issues of race, culture and power were missing from much of the conversation about the integration of technology into one's practice. Such a perspective gives little attention to the larger social, cultural, historical and political contexts in which computers are used.

By looking at four transformative teachers, this study attempts to contribute towards filling the void in the literature that speaks to larger issues of use of and access to computer technology in teaching practices. Critical Race Theory (CRT) plays an important role in my analysis and understanding of what it means to integrate computer technology into teaching Black students who attend urban schools. Central to this theory is the recognition of the significance and vital role that institutional racism plays in the lives of students and teachers in urban contexts. For Black students who have historically been marginalized in the larger U.S. society through overt and covert forms of racism, technology is often viewed as a critical tool that will enhance their ability to successfully participate in society. However such an argument fails to consider the social and political meanings of success for Black children living in U.S. society. Thus, meaningful integration of computer technology into urban classrooms requires addressing the following two questions: 1) How do

transformative Black teachers view computer technology in ways that meet the personal and cultural needs of their Black students? 2) What kinds of curricula connect to the lives of Black students and provide ways for them to participate in the world on their own terms? In order to understand these questions, I documented and analyzed the *ngona* (counter stories) of four transformative teachers. My goal in analyzing these counter stories was not to paint a picture of one transformative practice; rather I sought to understand the multiplicity of ways that transformation occurred in the practice of Black teachers who were committed to social and political change.

Below, I provide an overview of the previous four chapters in which I describe the classroom practices of Jones, Kofi, Cooper and St. John. Next, I consider these Black teachers' commitment to education as well as their views about computer technology in the lives of their Black students. Following this discussion, I present a synthesis of several dimensions of their teaching practices. Common to all of these teachers was the way they situated the use of the Internet and computer-related technology as a liberating tool in their classrooms as well as the ways they connected to and drew from the experiences of their students. I close with implications for teachers, teacher educators and the larger community.

### *Overview*

Although all four teachers thought about technology as a liberating tool in their classrooms, they used the Internet and computer-related technologies in vastly different ways. Both Jones and Kofi utilized the Internet to build connections to their students' African cultural consciousness. In particular, Jones constructed a classroom

community where her students designed spot drawings that reflected their understandings of the Amistad experience by using outdated versions of software programs such as PhotoDeluxe and PowerPoint. Kofi's students mined the Internet in order to pull and analyze the original speeches of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois. Kofi's students were exposed to liberatory narratives about the Black experience via Internet research. By using the Internet, his students saw positive and diverse imaging and learned important information about their cultural history. As demonstrated in his ngona, Kofi seemed to foster an environment where his Black students formulated their own thoughts about oppression, liberation and self-reliance. In both ngona, the Internet and other computer-related technology became a counter-hegemonic tool for helping their students' access and depict liberating material about their communities of African descent.

Cooper and St. John used technology differently as a liberatory practice. They built connections to their students and their communities using computer technology as a medium. These teachers strived to help their students make sense of their personal worlds. For example, Cooper used Microsoft Word processing software to facilitate her Black students' development of voice through autobiographical writing. In essence, she wanted her Black students to be comfortable with naming their own realities. In doing so she taught her students word processing skills that she could not assume they knew. This digitized communication skill, she argued, was not only needed for high school and college, but also to function effectively and to create social change in larger society. St. John strived to create a space where his students could independently explore and create a digital video about "things that moved"

using digital cameras, digital videos and CD ROMs and editing software such as iMovie. In his ngona, St. John's students who were primarily Black, male and labeled as "emotionally disturbed" found a safe space in the computer laboratory where they could "express themselves."

*Interpretations: Transformative Black Teachers-  
Conductors of the Digital Underground Railroad*

I call each of these teachers modern day 'conductors of the underground railroad,' because like Black teachers of the past they attempted to construct a network of subversive experiences in their classrooms that moved their students toward a liberation of the mind. In other words, they set up informal experiences to help counter the hegemonic practices of racism prevalent in Roosevelt city schools and U.S. mainstream society. As I explained in Chapter 4, Roosevelt City has a long history of marginalizing and disenfranchising members of the Black community. Once accomplished through forced, racial segregation and lack of access to resources, marginalization and disenfranchisement are still prevalent today. However, within these institutionalized constraints, the four transformative Black teachers resisted obstacles and created spaces in their classrooms to provide authentic educational experiences for the Black students.

By examining these transformative Black teachers' perspectives on the use of computer technology in the lives of their students, we can also develop an understanding of how computer technology can be thought about in culturally responsive ways. These teachers thought deeply about the purpose and intention of the use of computer technology not only in their teaching practices, but also in the

lives of their students. These Black teachers believed that it was their responsibility to develop in their students both technical and ‘critical computer literacy’ skills that could be utilized both inside and outside of the classroom. I refer to ‘critical computer literacy’ as students developing the skills to, as Cooper argued, “read between the lines.” In other words, these transformative Black teachers wanted their students to “talk back” to the computer by examining meanings in the text, posing questions and searching for answers. These teachers wanted their students to recognize that text on the Internet was not neutral, but rather offered perspectives that could help their students to develop stances on particular issues. Therefore, they held themselves personally accountable to not only thinking about the role of technology in their students’ academic lives, but also about the role that technology played in advancing the agenda of the larger Black community.

Thus far, I have provided an overview of these teachers’ philosophies about the use of computer technology in the lives of Black students. I now turn my attention to an analysis and interpretation of the authentic experiences that they created in their classrooms. My discussion is framed by three dominant themes that were present in these teachers’ practices as they integrated the Internet and computer-related technology in the teaching and learning experiences in their practices. These themes represent relationships, knowledge and curriculum as it relates to these transformative teachers use of computer technology:

- The Internet and computer-related technology were important tools for helping these transformative Black teachers and their students engage in meaningful instruction about the lives and experiences of people of African descent.

- Black students constructed knowledge in a learning community that included the teacher, in the role of facilitator, and the computer as an intellectual partner and a critical educational tool.
- The Internet and computer-related technology was a medium for legitimizing students' real life experiences as they became part of the "official" curriculum.

### Computer Technology as a Transformative Tool in Teaching Practice

The practices of these four transformative Black teachers suggested that the Internet and computer-related technologies were a dynamic tool for accessing the liberating stories of the Black experience. In other words, the Internet and computer related technologies helped these Black teachers bring to the fore the lives, experiences, contributions and stories of people of African descent. Additionally, in the ngora of Jones, Cooper and St. John, I found that these teachers fostered environments where their Black students became the authors of personally and culturally liberating stories. By utilizing computer technology in this culturally responsive manner, these transformative Black teachers fostered an environment where the school curriculum reflected the images of their Black students. In essence, Black people, their history and their experiences became the subject, rather than the object, of the "official" curriculum in their classrooms (King, 2001). These transformative Black teachers used the Internet and computer-related technology as a way of accessing liberating stories. They used the computer-related technologies to disseminate those stories. Finally, they used the computer as a way to encourage their students to develop their own student voice.

### Accessing Liberatory Knowledge

In their classroom practice, the Black teachers in this study seemed to think deeply about ways to centralize positive imaging of Black people. They used the Internet as a way to excavate positive Black imaging and to unveil the silenced stories in the school curriculum about the Black experience. These teachers talked about “deprogramming” their students by countering the prevailing stereotypes that exist about the Black community so rife in the media and in larger society.

Kofi and Jones, in particular, used the Internet to help their students develop self-knowledge and Black consciousness. Kofi utilized computer technology and, more specifically, the Internet, to expose students to their African American culture. He wanted his students to have a clear sense of their shared history and cultural heroes who paved the way for their existence. Likewise, Jones used the Internet to help her students locate and unveil African stories of perseverance and resistance such as the Amistad, stories that were often marginalized or eliminated from the official school curriculum.

Additionally, all of these teachers seemed to understand the value of exposing their students to diverse cultural environments via the Internet. These four Black teachers recognized that for their Black students, who rarely left their neighborhoods, much less Roosevelt city, the Internet provided a portal to access different cities, countries and cultures from across the world. For example, Jones mentioned in her log the possibilities of taking her urban students to a farm community or the Tower of Pisa. St. John used the Internet to teach Ancient Greek philosophy and Modern Greek culture and life. Although St. John would argue that the best form of teaching

would be to actually provide his students with the authentic experiences, like all of these transformative teachers, he believed that the Internet served as an invaluable tool for exposing students to both liberating Black stories and diverse cultures.

### Disseminating Liberatory Knowledge

The development of personal and cultural voice was evident in all of these teachers' practices. They used the Internet and computer-related technologies as a presentation and dissemination tool for their students' work. In the way it was used, computer technology became a conduit for producing their students' work for a broader audience. For example, St. John's students constructed iMovies on 'things that move.' The iMovie became a vehicle that enabled his students to manifest their ideas in video format with background music. Not only were the iMovies informative, but they were also artistic expressions of his students' talents. For instance, Darrell, one of St. John's students, presented his hip hop lyrics as background music in his iMovie images as a form of self expression and storytelling. In the same way, Jones utilized PhotoDeluxe and PowerPoint in her Amistad unit to help her students develop digitally enhanced spot drawings about the Holocaust of Enslavement. The computer technology not only aided in the design and creation, but also in the dissemination of liberating stories about her students' impressions of the Amistad. These stories were made available for a wider audience to read and study when the digitized book was placed on-line.

### The Development of Personal and Cultural Voice

These teachers also used the Internet and computer-related technologies as a way of providing a space for their students to express their own realities (Duran, 1999). Cooper believed that the editing options in Microsoft Word helped her students to become more confident writers. As opposed to experiencing the traditional “pen and paper” editing process of the “red ink” and the ongoing rewrites, Cooper found that tools found on Microsoft Word such as cut and paste and spell check expedited the editing process. She believed that this digitized editing process allowed her students to focus on the content of the work as opposed to spending time rewriting. For example, throughout her thematic unit that focused on autobiographical writing, elaboration and student voice, she encouraged her students to add colorful stories that would enhance their essays. Using the Microsoft Word features, the process of adding text was simplified. In other words, because students could add or eliminate text, the focus was on the development of student story.

Cooper also used computer technology as a conduit for her students to depict their familial rituals and practices through storytelling. For example, one of her students wrote about his experience going to a barbershop. By writing about and sharing his story, both he and his peers recognized that they could relate to each others’ everyday ‘Black experiences’ that were often absent from mainstream media. Finally, Cooper took advantage of the Internet as a way for her students to locate information pertaining to social activism, such as the implementation of school vouchers in urban schools. She would challenge her students to raise questions such as: What is the impact of vouchers on Black children attending urban public schools?

What are the experiences of other school districts that implemented vouchers? What do other community members and businesses have to say about the voucher policy? To this end, she would link her instruction to real world problems using the Internet and other computer-related technologies as a knowledge source available to students as they developed their responses. Therefore, Cooper used computer technology in her classroom practice in utilitarian ways by teaching her students the fundamentals of keyboarding and Microsoft word processing functions such as cutting, pasting, spell check and grammar check and in ways that attended to the development of student voice and social activism.

Likewise, both Kofi and Jones used the Internet and computer technology as a way of developing their students' understandings of Africa and the Diaspora. Students were free to explore and investigate essays, poems, pictures and speeches from various historical time periods. Ongoing Internet research, in turn, helped to inform their students' projects. For example, after conducting Internet research on Booker T. Washington and reading the chapter in their textbook on *Black leaders speak out*, Kofi's students developed sophisticated arguments about Black dependency. The students argued that many Black people are still burdened by invisible shackles, not much different than the physical state of dependency of their enslaved ancestors. They posited that, as members of the Black community, they must build and support Black-owned business as a way to not maintain the "same dependency state that we are in." In this way, Kofi's students began to name their own reality, and also determine ways to actively produce social change.

### Storytelling

By examining these Black teachers storytelling practices, we uncover yet another way that computer technology became contextualized to meet the cultural and personal needs of their Black students. The transformative teachers in this study situated the use of computer technology within the larger context of the pedagogical practice of storytelling, a practice deeply rooted in the African and African American experience (Lawrence, 1995). For instance, Cooper used storytelling as a way to engage her students in an autobiographical assignment. She also shared her own personal stories as a way to model and to provide a way of thinking about the process of elaboration for her students.

Jones would tell liberating racialized stories of perseverance and resistance as a way of helping her students think about the images they would produce using computer technology. To contextual his students' Internet research, Kofi shared personal stories about his childhood or about the impact of certain African American cultural heroes on him. Storytelling used in this way became a way to build connections between teacher and students and a mode to introduce the use of computer technology in their thematic units.

### Individualized Instruction

Each transformative teacher worked independently with students to help them develop basic computer technology skills. In this role, teachers served as facilitators working alongside the computer technology in order to help each student construct knowledge. For example, Cooper sat down with each student, while he or she worked at the computer, and demonstrated how to cut, paste, save, format and

paginate each autobiographical essay. Jones utilized individualized instruction to direct technical advice to each student's spot drawing. St. John, in a similar way, assisted his students with technical instruction while students worked on their iMovie projects. He would show his students how to conduct Internet research or how to use the video camera in ways that met each student's personal needs and academic levels.

At the same time, each teacher would take advantage of the one-on-one instruction with computer technology to build connections to their students. They would offer academic advice and pose questions to strengthen their students' work. For instance, Jones after viewing her students Amistad pictorial, pushed her students to think about and to write an editorial statement that captured the concept. She began by posing questions to help each student think about his or her concept. St. John utilized individual instruction in order to help his students to master deeper lessons about patience and perseverance. For example, while working with his students, he explained why the computer took time to process. He gently reminded them of the importance of waiting. Cooper sat with her students and read through their work individually. While reading, she would pose questions about their lives for further clarification. During this exchange, she would share personal stories about herself and childhood experiences.

The ways that these transformative Black teachers used computer technology for individualized instruction provides an understanding of how computer technology as an instructional tool can be utilized in cultural responsive ways. These teachers used one-on-one time with their students to build personal connections and relationships, to provide technical support, and to offer relevant and contextual

instructional assistance to the academic needs of their students. In all cases, these teachers found it essential to build individualized instruction into their pedagogical practices. In other words, the teacher, student and computer technology co-currently interacted to engage the student in authentic dialogue in which their lives and experiences became personally relevant to the instruction.

### The Personification of Computer Technology

Transformative teachers viewed the computer as a supportive partner in their classrooms. The four transformative teachers in this study fostered classroom environments where their students built relationships with the computer technology by giving the computers human-like qualities. To illustrate, I observed that Kofi named each of his computers. Two of his computers were called Martin (Luther King) and (Steven) Beko. Molefi Asante, Afrocentric theorist, sheds light on this phenomenon by delineating an African-centered perspective on technology and advancement. He argues that many people of African descent “energize every aspect of nature,” and calls it “personalism” (Asante,1998). Personalism includes both the spiritual and the material. Thus, trees, mountains, chairs and computers possess essences. He further explains that this may be one of the reasons why many people of African descent and Europeans descent differ in how they view technological progress. For Africans, progress is related to the development of the human personality because “we are the source of life for the material and the spiritual; when [people of African descent] become conscious of ourselves [people of African descent] shall be advanced and will make progress” (p.81).

A common theme across all four transformative teachers was that they understood themselves and their students to be the source of light for the computer technology. In this way, computer technology became one of many sources for building personal and cultural awareness. This notion of understanding technology as a source of energy manifested itself in important ways. First, teachers personified the computer technology by giving technology human-like qualities. By doing this, it seemed as though these Black teachers provided a space where their students could enter into a relationship with the computer. For example, in St. John's class, it was not uncommon for him to give human-like qualities to the computer technology. During a classroom observation, he said to a student, "be patient with her, this will take a moment." Here, St. John is deconstructing a veil of distrust as it relates to a commonly held fear and frustration that some of his students hold towards computer technology. By personalizing the computer, he seems to be helping his students build connections to the computer technology while simultaneously encouraging them to think about the technology as a partner to be treated with care.

Conversations with Jones revealed that she, too, personified the computer. She said that she viewed computer technology as an extension of her students' hands, which underscores her perspective that the students are the source of energy for the use of the computer technology. In other words, Jones believed that computer technology could embody and inform the values, the beliefs and the cultural understandings of the Black students who used them to extend their natural talent. In Jones' class, computer technology was thought about as a research partner and a design aid, enabling her students to manifest their conceptual projects.

### Embracing Black Students' Lives and Experiences

As the teachers considered the use of the Internet and computer-related technologies, they all thought about their students' identities and the kinds of experiences they brought into the classroom when planning a lesson. For example, St. John invited his students' questions, experiences, comments and concerns as a beginning point for designing his thematic units. In this way, he embraced his students' experiences with computer technology and integrated it into the curriculum. Computer games such as Game boy and X Box engaged his students' interests. Therefore, he used his students' love of video games as a starting point for helping them develop more sophisticated computer technological skills on educational computer software programs.

Cooper, like St. John, provided a space where her students were positioned as the subjects of the curriculum as opposed to objects. She always designed her technologically enhanced lessons by embracing her students' lives and experiences. Rather than asking her students to "park their lives by the door," she transformed the curriculum to include the "text" of their students' lives. In the same vein, Kofi and Jones thought about ways to build connections between their students and a historical cultural consciousness. The computer technology, therefore, became a conduit for building and connecting their students' personal and cultural lives to the curriculum.

### *Implications for Teachers, Teaching Practice, and the Community*

As I have illustrated in this dissertation, access to the Internet and computer-related technologies translated into access to knowledge for Black children living in

inner-urban areas. Urban schools serve as one of the few access points to computer-related technologies for these Black children (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1999). When computers are utilized in urban schools, much of the practice reflects skill and drill (Becker & Ravitz, 1998; Wenglinski, 1998). The use of drill and skill practices using computer technology is not uncommon. In general, teachers are challenged by how to integrate computer technology into their teaching practice in meaningful ways (Cuban, 2001; Net Day, 2001). Inadequate and vacuous uses of the Internet and computer-related technologies have important implications for Black students attending inner-urban school in the information age.

As my research suggests, these transformative Black teachers thought about the purpose and intention of computer technology underlying its use in their classroom practice. Therefore, they used computer technology in ways that responded to their Black students' personal and cultural needs. Unless we begin to think about computer technology as a transformative tool embedded in one's larger teaching practice and in the cultural lives of students, computer technology will continue to be conceived in technical and culturally disconnected ways or used in periphery if at all.

This study provides insight into power and potential of computer technology in inner-urban classrooms. As teacher educators and professional developers focus on culturally responsive teaching, they need to bring to the fore the use of technology as a cultural tool in teaching practice and connect it to the lives of students. Computer use should be thought about in relation to their students' social location and as a medium to elicit the building of self and cultural identity. In addition, computer

technology should be thought about as a tool for disseminating important culturally-relevant information. Therefore, professional development and teacher education must be reconceptualized to include learning “in and from” one’s own situated practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999), with ongoing collaboration about meaningful computer use. Ongoing and sustained professional development, mentorship and inquiry groups can be used to support teachers in their learning about computer integration in culturally responsive ways.

At the same time, access to and meaningful uses of computer technology should be thought about in ways that stretch beyond the classroom and school. The onus should not be solely on teachers and schools to educate Black students about the Internet and computer-related technologies. We must also begin to think about ways that non-profit organizations, churches and community centers can serve as a site for educating members of marginalized communities about meaningful uses of computer technology.

Finally, this work illustrates the importance of sensitizing the research community to the significance of real teachers’ intellectual and practical work in inner-urban contexts as they develop ongoing research projects. Research that examines the lives and transformative practices of Black teachers in various settings (urban, inner-urban, suburban, rural, high, middle and low socioeconomic, private, public, male and female) are needed to portray a nuanced understanding of exemplary teaching for Black students. It is particularly important to document the teaching practices of exemplary Black teachers working in the inner-urban context, those whose tales are often misrepresented or hidden from everyday understandings

(Foster, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1991; Lynn, 2001; Henry, 1990). This research is instructive because it illuminates the power and potential of exploring what teachers do and how they talk about their practice as it relates to theory on culturally responsive teaching and critical race pedagogy.

### *Conclusions*

The teachers' stories provide an important contribution to understanding the potential of using technology in Black students' education. History, storytelling, and cultural knowledge situated in their students' lives were foundational to their experiences with technology. While these four teachers may have held different perspectives toward transformation, they shared similar commitments as they integrated technology into their teaching practices. These teachers were flexible, they were self-reliant and they were constantly learning in order to meet the needs of their students. Additionally, these transformative Black teachers used the Internet and computer related technologies as a liberating tool. They constructed knowledge in a learning community that included the use of computer technology, and they used computer technology as a conduit for legitimizing their students' Black experience.

If educators, researchers and policy makers are truly concerned about how the Internet and computer-related technologies can be used as meaningful tools in the education of Black students, they must move beyond technical and instrumental perspectives of uses of technology. The challenge of the "digital divide" is more than the placement of computers in the classroom and more than using computers as an aid to learning. Computers are, first and foremost, tools that have cultural meanings and

political consequences. Consequently, this study illustrates the significance of shifting the conversation from students' access to computers to one of students' experiences with computers.

As the conversation shifts its focus, it is critical that transformative Black, teachers, who have intimate knowledge of their students' lives and the devastation of racism in their work and their students' learning become integral members of conversational communities. Without such partnerships, it seems likely that the rhetoric of the "digital divide" and *No Child Left Behind* will remain just that, rhetoric. To this end,

What should we be doing? The answers, I believe, lie not in a proliferation of new reform programs but in some basic understandings of who we are and how we are connected to ...one another.

*Lisa Delpit, Other People's Children:  
Cultural Conflicts in the Classroom*

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Demographics of Historically Black and White Neighborhoods in Roosevelt City Historically Black Neighborhood

	CLUSTER 4: 1990	CLUSTER 4:2000	CITY-WIDE: 2000
Population	8,233	8,596	572,059
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	99%	98%	60%
White	0%	1%	31%
Hispanic	1%	0%	8%
Income			
Median Household Income	19,947	\$24,854	43,001
Education			
High School	53%	N/A	78%
College Graduates	6%	N/A	39%
Housing			
Owner Occupied	17%	15%	41%

**Source: Taken from the Roosevelt Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (2002)  
Cluster 15**

### Historically White Neighborhood

	CLUSTER 4: 1990	CLUSTER 4:2000	CITY-WIDE: 2000
Population	12,869	12,869	572,059
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	6%	11%	60%
White	88%	73%	31%
Hispanic	8%	16%	8%
Income			
Median Household Income	\$51,071	\$73,156	43,001
Education			
High School	93%	N/A	78%
College Graduates	72%	N/A	39%
Housing			
Owner Occupied	42%	47%	41%

**Taken from the Roosevelt Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (2002) Cluster 37**

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### Historically White Neighborhood

	CLUSTER 4: 1990	CLUSTER 4:2000	CITY-WIDE: 2000
Population	17,919	18,697	572,059
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	4%	7%	60%
White	90%	85%	31%
Hispanic	5%	8%	8%
Income			
Median Household Income	\$53,404	\$83,015	43,001
Education			
High School	96%	N/A	78%
College Graduates	76%	N/A	39%
Housing			
Owner Occupied	48%	52%	41%

**Taken from the Roosevelt Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (2002) Cluster 4**

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### Historically Black Neighborhood

	CLUSTER 4: 1990	CLUSTER 4:2000	CITY-WIDE: 2000
Population	5,689	4,873	572,059
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	96%	97%	60%
White	3%	2%	31%
Hispanic	1%	1%	8%
Income			
Median Household Income	\$19,276	\$23,658	43,001
Education			
High School	52%	N/A	78%
College Graduates	4%	N/A	39%
Housing			
Owner Occupied	24%	26%	41%

**Taken from the Roosevelt Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (2002) Cluster 28**

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**Appendix B: Differences in curriculum between two Roosevelt City Public High Schools**

<b>Western High School</b>	<b>Coolidge High School</b>
Racial Make-Up	Racial Make-Up
Black 100%	Black 56%
White	White 18%
Asian	Asian 8%
Latino	Latino 18%
Free Lunch 59%	Free Lunch 37%

**Advanced Placement Courses**

<b>Western High School</b>	<b>Coolidge High School</b>
Biology,	U.S. History
Calculus,	Comparative Government
Chemistry,	Calculus AB
English,	Computer Science AB
US History	Physics
	English Language Spanish Language French
	Language
	Studio Art
	U.S. Government and Politics
	Statistics
	Calculus
	Biology
	Latin Virgil
	English Literature
	Spanish Literature
	French Literature
	Art History
	World History

**Clubs and Additional Activities**

<b>Western High School</b>	<b>Coolidge High School</b>
<p>Marching, Jazz band, Journalism, Athletics, Theater, yearbook, peer mediation, newspaper, substance abuse, red cross, National honors society, computer club, It's Academic, Chess club, SKI team The Washington post 500 club, creative writing club, toast masters, foreign language club, FHA-HER), FBLA, JROTC, Step team, Stock market club Concert Choir Gospel Choir Drill Team</p>	<p>Debate Club German Club It's Academic Journalism Club Latin Club Math Center Tutors Math Club National Honor Society Odyssey of the Mind Science Club Writing Center Staff Arts Art Club Fashion Club Wilson Players Career Oriented Future Business Leaders of America JROTC National Institute for Teaching Entrepreneurship Cultural Asian Students Club Hispanic Enrichment &amp; Leadership Program Latinas in Action Government/Politics Harvard Model Congress Model United Nations Student Government Association Health and Drug Awareness Tobacco Intervention Stress Management Music Chorus Concert Band Marching Band</p>

Flag Twirlers  
Jazz Ensemble  
Peaceable Schools  
Diversity Workshop Leaders  
'Keep it Real'  
Peer Mediators  
The Movement  
Gay Straight Alliance  
Publications  
The Beacon School Newspaper  
Lines Literary Magazine  
School Yearbook  
The Wisper WISP Newsletter  
Recreational  
Bridge Club  
Chess Club  
Intramural Sports  
Service  
EnvironMentors  
Male Initiative  
Recycling Club  
Tigers Against AIDS (HIV/AIDS Peer  
Educators)  
Teen Women in Action  
C.A.R.E - Concern for AnimalRights and the  
Environment Technology  
Wilson Web Page  
Tiger Radio

## Appendix C Interview Protocol

### Initial Interview

#### Teacher Interview

##### *Background*

1. Tell me something about your background. When and where were you educated? When did you begin teaching? Why did you begin teaching? When did you first start using educational computer technology? How did this happen?

##### *Philosophy*

2. What does teaching mean to you? Does this differ from other teachers in the school? What is your approach to teaching when utilizing the Internet and computer-related technologies?

##### *Learning to Teach*

3. What educational experiences have most influenced you as a teacher?
4. Who and where do you turn to when you have challenges?
5. What individuals most influenced your understanding of teaching?
6. For you, what have been the greatest sources for teaching?

##### Prompt

- a. Teacher preparation?
- b. Professional development?

##### *Experiences using technology*

6. What are your experiences using technology in urban schools?
7. What are your current experiences teaching using technology?

##### *Teaching and Learning using technology*

8. How do you approach planning your lessons using technology?

##### Prompt

- a. Co-plan with other teachers
- b. Think about the content first and then technology?
9. What have been your experiences using computer technology with Black students?
10. What kind of things have you done in the classroom using computer technology to facilitate academic success of African-American students? Are there students that you have been unable to reach using technology?  
Prompt: beliefs
11. What kind of role do parents and the community play in the education of Black students?
12. If you could revamp the teaching of African-American children using technology, what would it look like?
13. What challenges do you encounter using computer technology in your classroom?

## **Appendix D**

### **Sample Pre-observation Interview**

#### *The Classroom Community*

1. Tell me about the students in your class. What experiences do students bring to the classrooms? What experiences do students bring to the classroom related to computer technology?
2. How might you describe the relationship that students have with one another?
  - a. Prompt: Gender-technology
  - a. Prompt on ways the teacher builds a classroom community
  - b. Prompt: What kind of parental and community involvement have you tried?

#### *The Instructional Unit*

3. Tell me about the unit that I will be observing.
4. What do you hope that the students will learn?
5. What computer technologies will you be using? Why did you choose these technologies? How did the students learn to use these technologies? What challenges do you anticipate?
6. How will the computer technology be used to support the thematic unit? Will this be difficult for the students?

## **Appendix E**

### **Sample Observation Protocol**

This interview will follow the observation of the thematic unit. Questions may change depending on the specific thematic unit.

#### *The Instructional Unit*

1. Is there anything that you would like for me to know about your thematic unit?
2. In retrospect, were your goals realized? What do you think your students learned?
2. What challenges did you face in general? What challenges did you face when using the Internet and computer-related technologies?
3. How do you think the use of computer technology made a difference in your students' learning?

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