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**DEVELOPING AN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT RESOURCE AREA
WITH EMPHASIS ON USING AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE
AS A LINK TO GENERAL CULTURAL LITERACY**

A Dissertation Presented

by

VELMA REDDICK

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

MAY 1996

Education

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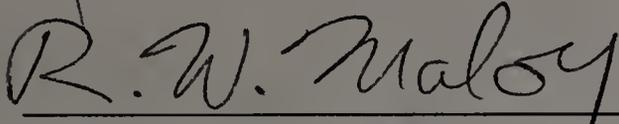
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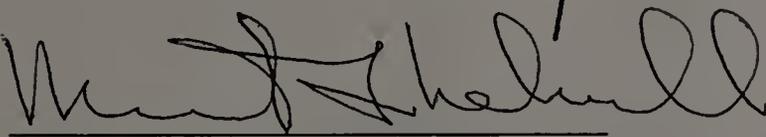
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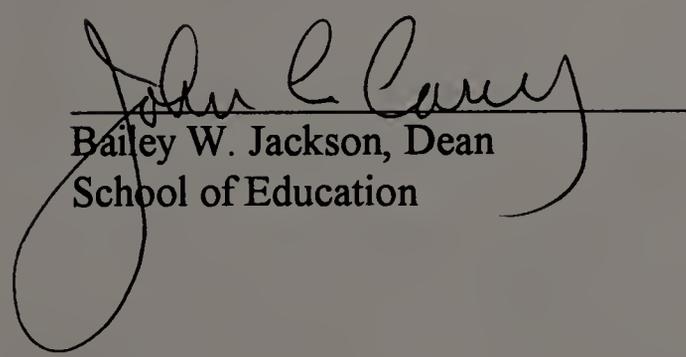
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My devoted husband, **James**, who was my main support and the person who “had my back,”

and

My loving children, **Marc** and **Cherelle**, and their concerned spouses, **Jannie** and **Gregory**, who encouraged me to “hang in there;” my affectionate parents, **Charles** and **Paralee**, who are now deceased, but who provided me with a firm foundation; to my wonderful sister, **Ella**, who has, on many occasions, imparted inspirational words of wisdom, to my best friend, **Lorraine** (recently deceased), who was ever loyal; and to my “precious” grandchildren who helped me maintain my sense of humor and balance:

Tyrone

Marcus

Velarie

Omar

Charles

Veltrice

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Roosevelt Board of Education

ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING AN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT RESOURCE AREA WITH
EMPHASIS ON USING AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURE AS
A LINK TO GENERAL CULTURAL LITERACY

MAY 1996

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Directed by: Professor Byrd L. Jones

In the past decades, many American high school graduates have been deprived of the cultural vocabulary that was once the fundamental and common possession of educated persons in past generations. This dearth of knowledge--also described as a lack of cultural literacy is a glaring problem, reflected quite noticeably in declining scores on standardized tests.

This national paucity in cultural literacy has not left the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School (in Roosevelt, New York) unscathed; therefore, this study assessed the needs of the students and devised strategies to meet those needs. In 1991, five workshops were conducted for teachers in the English/Language Arts department.

Because the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School, which comprises a predominantly Black, middle-class student population, has not escaped this national malady, this study utilized action research to improve teaching techniques and enhance cultural literacy. Using African-American culture as a vehicle, an effort was made to forge a link between Black culture (emphasizing the literacy aspect) and other required materials. The main objective was, and still is to motivate students to learn, thereby improving their academic status and raising their test scores.

In every field of endeavor--be it educational, or otherwise, it would benefit the leaders or staff members to make attempts to meet the students, workers, or members, where they are on their various intellectual and inspirational levels, tapping into their latent talents.

With emphasis on collaboration and an action research approach, an effort was made to implement measures for solving the stated problem. Academically, this study offered students the opportunity to use their cultural heritage, their interests and their talents as a catalyst to general "world knowledge." This rise in levels of cultural literacy may lead to greater feelings of self-worth, and eventual improvement in test scores on teacher-made tests as well as standardized tests.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Because of low scores on standardized tests in the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School, particularly in the language arts; administrators, teachers, and students have struggled to devise a better curriculum. Teachers try to educate students while many students remain disinterested, unmotivated, and often resentful. In “prepping” students for standardized exams, many teachers try to “teach the test,” asking students to memorize fragmented information that appears irrelevant to the student’s background or present situation.

As a result, time is wasted, goals are thwarted and efforts are futile since these tests supposedly center around “cumulative” knowledge. What can educators do to spark student enthusiasm and motivation? This dissertation will document the planning, organization and implementation of a staff development project-- essentially a case study with ninth, tenth, and eleventh-grade English classes in the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School.

Throughout the Roosevelt Junior Senior High School English department, action research was utilized. A conventional definition of action research is “small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention.”¹ Because action research employs some very tangible features, it can be very effective. It is situational because “it is concerned with

diagnosing a problem in a specific context” with “an attempt to solve it in that context.” It is usually collaborative because teams of researchers and practitioners work together on a project; it is participatory because team members themselves take part directly or indirectly in implementing the research; and it is self-evaluative because modifications are continuously evaluated within the ongoing situation, with an ultimate objective of improving practice in some way or another.²

Action research can consist of two stages: a diagnostic stage in which the problems are analyzed and the hypotheses developed; and a therapeutic stage in which the hypotheses are tested by a consciously directed change experiment, preferably in a social life situation. In an educational context, action research should contribute not only to practice but to an educational theory that is accessible to other teachers.³

Much time and effort have been expended nationwide in an attempt to improve students’ scores on standardized tests and generally to produce more literate high school graduates. Even though the standard of literacy required by modern society has been rising throughout the developed world, American literacy rates have not risen to meet this standard. Since only highly literate societies can prosper economically, what seemed an acceptable level in the 1950s is no longer acceptable in the late 1980s.⁴ In fact anxious to revive its lagging role on education reform issues, the Bush administration recently “issued a plan for voluntary nationwide testing, job retraining and establishment of model “New American Schools” where students would meet world-class academic standards⁵

While much of Japan's industrial efficiency has been attributed to its almost universally high level of literacy, the United States can boast of only producing a two-thirds literacy rate among its citizens, and even among those, the average level is too low and should be raised. Also, the remaining third of United States citizens needs to be brought as close to true literacy as possible.⁶ This information is noteworthy but debatable, so an opposing point of view will be presented in the next chapter of this dissertation.

Statement of Problem and Purpose

Ultimately, the aim of American education should be to attain universal literacy at a very high level, to achieve not only greater economic prosperity but also greater social justice and more effective democracy. Americans have long accepted literacy as a paramount aim of schooling, but recent research has revealed that literacy is far more than a skill as it also requires large amounts of specific information. This body of facts is referred to as "world knowledge" by some and "cultural literacy" by others. Actually, it is the network of information that all competent readers possess, for it is the background information stored in their minds that enables them to take up a newspaper and read it with an adequate level of comprehension, getting the point, grasping the implications, and relating what they read to the unstated context which alone gives meaning to what they read. The key to all other fundamental improvements in American education is the achievement of high universal literacy.⁷

There is a dire need for improved literacy nationwide and the small community of Roosevelt, a suburban community of Long Island, despite the show of improvement in standardized test scores, has not escaped this plight. Roosevelt is a reflection of America and its social problems; therefore, the Roosevelt School District, like many other American school districts, has a large number of less privileged students who are lacking in cultural literacy according to Eurocentric standards. Another point of view is that in psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic terms, everyone has cultural literacy. Also, some educators are more concerned about students' lack of computer experience and do not agree that the need for cultural literacy is a major problem.

This researcher believes, however, that despite the fact that America is the technological and educational opportunity mecca of the world, there is a severe problem. This glaring problem is that there is a dearth of general knowledge among American high school students and this is reflected in their scores on standardized tests. In order to put into perspective the importance of background knowledge in language, evidence has been presented from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This was a nationwide measurement mandated by Congress and it shows that between 1970 and 1980, seventeen-year olds declined in their ability to understand written materials, and the decline was especially striking in the top group - the so called "advanced" students who read on a high level. Although these scores are now beginning to rise, they remain quite low.⁸

Additional noteworthy quantitative data have come from the scores of the verbal Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). John B. Carroll, a distinguished psychometrician has stated that the verbal SAT is essentially a test of “advanced vocabulary knowledge” which makes it a fairly sensitive instrument for measuring levels of literacy. In the past fifteen years, SAT scores have declined dramatically amid controversial charges that the test is biased and outdated.⁹

Prior to the College Board’s disclosure of the full statistics in 1984, anti-alarmists could argue that the fall in average verbal scores could be explained by the rise in the number of disadvantaged students taking the SATs, but that argument can no longer be made. Clearly, our best educated and most talented young people are showing diminished verbal skills as measured by SAT standards. The records show that out of a constant pool of about a million test takers each year, 56 percent more students scored above six-hundred in 1972 than did so in 1984. Shockingly, the percentage drop was even greater for those scoring above six-hundred fifty--73 percent.¹⁰

During the period 1970-1985, the amount of shared knowledge that has been taken for granted in communicating with fellow citizens has also been declining. More and more, young people no longer know what was previously assumed to be common or basic knowledge. As a result of the diminution in shared information, such publications as Newsweek and the Wall Street Journal, have published articles on this subject.¹¹

People in general, and students in particular, often have latent talents that can be tapped by the school system through the resourcefulness and sensitivity of its teachers who themselves are cultivating their talents and pooling ideas in a collaborative effort toward school improvement. The main purpose of this study was to assess and try to fill the need for cultural enhancement in each participating teacher and student. Additional objectives were to improve teaching techniques, raise students' self-esteem, build students' self-confidence, and in doing so, help raise students' scores on standardized tests as well as teacher-made tests.

In every field of endeavor--be it educational, or otherwise, it would benefit the leaders or staff members to make attempts to meet the students, workers, or members, where they are on their various intellectual and inspirational levels to relate to them, stimulate their interests and establish a common ground on which to build sound educational and cultural foundations. The purpose of this study was to use action research to tap into that talent, improve teaching techniques and to enhance cultural knowledge as a bridge or link to general cultural literacy.

Setting--Community

Located in the southwestern section of Nassau County on Long Island in New York, Roosevelt is a village of one square mile. With a population of approximately 14,000, Roosevelt is an unincorporated community which is part of the town of Hempstead and which does not have its own local government, police, sanitation or health departments. Located along the main thoroughfare (Nassau Road) is a small

business district. Businesses here are classified as light industry; therefore, the homeowners bear a disproportionate share of the tax burden.

During the past three decades, Roosevelt has developed from a predominantly White, Jewish suburban residential district with senior students completing their high school years in Freeport or Hempstead, into a predominantly Black, self-contained pre-kindergarten through grade twelve district. It has gone from a student population of less than 10% Black (with 1/3rd of the Roosevelt population considered to be below the poverty line) to more than 90% Black. (According to the Roosevelt census office statistics for the 1988-89 school year, the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School student population was 94% Black).

Upwardly mobile, the parents of the Roosevelt community expect their school to provide the educational standard that will afford their children the opportunity to develop their skills, secure well-paying jobs, and improve the quality of their lives. Despite the persistence of class and racial biases which have plagued the community in the past, there is some optimism as Roosevelt continues the uphill struggle and challenge to produce students who are well-rounded academically and socially, and whose educational backgrounds are commensurate with those of other young people nationwide.

The Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School

The Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School has offered a comprehensive curriculum with tracking or leveling in each academic discipline; however, since the 1990-1991

school year, class groupings have been heterogeneous. The staff comprises a principal, two assistant principals, a dean of students, two Chapter One coordinators (reading and mathematics), five Lead Teachers, and approximately eighty-five other teachers. (The Lead Teachers presently serve as department heads or coordinators). The student population is about twelve hundred.

In an attempt to establish improved collaboration in the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School, a resource area for the English department has been coordinated in the school library. Books, pamphlets, "dittoes," and other instructional aids have been compiled in a designated area and then are used as different needs arise.

Methodology and Procedure

Utilizing the resource area itself and more importantly, the concept of collaboration, the population of this study comprised teachers and students. Needs assessments were administered and studied.

In group workshops, demonstrations, and individual case studies, some interviews were conducted, and sometime in the future, it is hoped that clinical supervision techniques will be applied. Since this is an ongoing and developing project, there will always be an effort to maintain flexibility and an allowance for unforeseen situations and extenuating circumstances.

Research Questions

In both a formal and informal manner, the following questions were asked of teachers in the English Department as an initial assessment:

1. From a general perspective, do you feel that our students in the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School are achieving adequately on tests (both teacher-made and standardized)?
2. Do you feel that our students are comfortable or satisfied with their levels of achievement?
3. In what ways have they indicated this to you?
4. Are you satisfied with their achievement levels?
5. Do you feel that there is a need to rectify this situation?
6. If such a need exists, what can we do about it?
7. In general, do you feel that our students have high or low self-esteem?
8. Do you feel that there is a connection between their grades and their self-esteem?
9. Whether you have been in a formal or informal setting, what are some of the students' concerns that they have made known to you?
10. What were your reactions?

Significance of Study

With such strong emphasis on preparation for and great expectations of high scores on standardized tests in various subject areas, there has been a loud outcry for increased cultural literacy among high school students. Basically, culture can be

defined as the entire way of life followed by a people. To be culturally literate is to understand what somebody is saying --more than the surface meanings of words; the context must be understood as well.

Although, the resource area is a physical place, situated in the library of the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School, the greater aspect of this developmental mode has had its effectiveness in the attitudes of the staff, projecting concepts of caring, sharing, and general collaboration. In general, the project of establishing an English department resource area utilized both a formal and informal structure to assess certain specific needs of the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School. Using this school as a focal point, the writer endeavored to (in goal #1) place an emphasis on personal as well as collective achievement. The rationale for this was that each student would become increasingly aware of the need to help other students succeed by providing an incentive and stimulus for his or her peers.

A second goal was and is to stimulate and share cultural excursions (to exhibits, theaters) while simultaneously increasing the English department resource pool--a repository of teaching aids and materials, designed to serve a common need. This stimulation of staff members, to some extent, has helped them share resources and cultural interests, and has helped to boost their morale. Such activities among the faculty tend to have a positive effect on the students--for "enthusiasm is catching."

As a means of increasing cultural literacy among students and staff members, the third goal was and is to continue to develop necessary skills to increase student

awareness of the arts and employ a collective effort to make cultural resources accessible as an integral part of the curriculum in the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School. This effort in conjunction with and as an extension of the first project dealing with staff collaboration (as opposed to teacher isolation) will continue to build and enhance cultural as well as academic resources.

The fundamental purpose of educators should be to ensure that all high school graduates are equipped with knowledge that will enable them to read serious books, newspapers, and articles addressed to the general reader. Although less than one in five Americans reads serious literature consistently, educators can exert a greater effort to reverse the trend. Another goal should be to enable high school graduates to write for a general audience. "Americans must be able to talk to each other not just in person or by telephone but across time and space through reading and writing."¹²

Essentially, educators should offer students opportunities to read or learn required material in the most attractive way. Also, the school has an obligation to recognize that students themselves are often the best judges of what they need to know. Since a very large number of Roosevelt's students are Black, educators would do well to heed Bernard Bell's observation:

In short, if there is an Afro-American canonical story, it is the quest, frequently with apocalyptic undertones, for freedom, literacy, and wholeness--personal and communal--grounded in social reality and ritualized in symbolic acts of Afro-American speech, music, and religion.¹³

Using African-American culture as a vehicle, an effort has been made to forge a link between Black culture (emphasizing the literary aspect) and other required materials. If this effort has been successful, one effect should be an increase in academic achievement which might be reflected in higher test scores.

Kunjufu's program called SETCLAE (Self-Esteem Through Culture Leads to Academic Excellence) poignantly articulates and exemplifies the purpose of this dissertation.¹⁴ Working with school districts, Kunjufu's African Images company has designed a manual called SETCLAE which examines "three variables: self-esteem, culture, and academic excellence." It can be an integration of the existing language arts or social studies curriculum, "or it can be taught as a separate unit."¹⁵ Regardless of format, the researcher concurs with Kunjufu who sees "a direct, positive relationship between self-esteem and academic achievement...."¹⁶

In response to the question of what to do to generate equal motivation for students in academics as there is in sports and music, Kunjufu blamed the schools for giving more glory to athletes than to scholars:

Where are the pep rallies for the honor roll students?
Where are the medals, trophies, and award ceremonies
for the debate, spelling, and science competition
winners? Schools give big trophies to their athletes and
make printed certificates to scholars.¹⁷

Certainly, schools are sending out a very clear message to students regarding the extent to which they value academic accomplishment.¹⁸

With emphasis on collaboration and an action research approach, the effort was made to implement measures for solving the stated problems. Teachers assessed

and indicated their own as well as their students' needs. Additionally, students themselves pinpointed and expressed their needs. This data, comprising a bulk of the project, has been gathered and studied.

Academically, this study offered students the opportunity to use their cultural heritage, their interests, and their talents as a catalyst to general "world knowledge." Kunjufu stated that all children have God-given talents.¹⁹ Unfortunately, many children never develop their talents as they grow up. The adage states, "You lose it if you don't use it." Parents and teachers should plan on providing as many varied experiences as possible to find each child's talents.²⁰

When students both (Black and White) graduate from high school, they should have acquired a good basic education including facility in standard English with strong cultural exposure while simultaneously being knowledgeable of Black English. Starting the formative years, each student's talents should be assessed and systematically developed as a link or vehicle to general cultural literacy as defined and evaluated by standardized exams.

A great effort has been exerted to raise the levels of cultural literacy which might be conducive to increased feelings of self-worth, and consistent improvement in test scores on teacher-made and standardized tests as well.

Limitations

This action research study was determined by individual teacher needs, student needs, teacher willingness to try to tap individual student talent, and teacher

presentation of literature by and about African-Americans, with the objective of inspiring cultural enhancement as a link to general cultural literacy. Through the establishment of the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School English Department Resource Area, the first phase of the stated and projected goals was achieved. By maintaining professional dialogue on the subject of cultural enhancement among students and teachers, some progress toward that objective was made.

Because of increasingly low teacher and student morale, some programs were not easily initiated and some changes were difficult to implement, consequently hindering the growth process. As Kegan said: "All growth is costly. It involves the leaving behind of an old way of being in the world. Often it involves at least for a time, leaving behind the others who have been identified with that old way of behaving."²¹ In the process of change, weaknesses must be honestly acknowledged--individually and collectively.²²

To discover basic limitations in one's whole way of knowing can be by itself an anxious and difficult experience, but it is the creation of the new other in the process which makes it also a potentially shameful experience. Shame involves the recognition that others have been aware of vulnerabilities in me that I am only now coming to see. Before, I was naked; now I see that I am uncovered.²³

The continued development of this project will depend upon the participants' willingness or unwillingness to be uncovered.

In his chapter entitled "The Risk of Loss," from The Road Less Traveled, Peck reiterated his concept of the "act of love--extending oneself. . . a moving out

against the inertia of laziness (work) or the resistance engendered by fear (courage).”²⁴ An extension of self necessitates entering new and unfamiliar territory.

Our self becomes a new and different self. We do things we are not accustomed to do. We change. The experience of change, of unaccustomed activity, of being on unfamiliar ground, of doing things differently is frightening. It always was and always will be. People handle their fear of change in different ways, but the fear is inescapable if they are in fact to change. Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the making of action in spite of fear, the moving out against the resistance engendered by fear into the unknown and into the future. . . .²⁵

Administrators and teachers might do well to heed Peck’s warning to parents in the chapter called “The Risk of Commitment.” “It is impossible to truly understand another without making room for that person within yourself.”²⁶ Peck maintained that since children are continually growing and their needs are changing, we must also change and grow with them.²⁷

He warned that the unwillingness to risk the suffering of change, growth, and instruction from youth will lead to a path of senility and will result in being left behind by both the youth and the world. “Learning from their children is the best opportunity most people have to assure themselves of a meaningful old age. Sadly, most do not take this opportunity.”²⁸

Some graduate education courses attempt to enable teachers and administrators to facilitate and enhance staff development by exploring the concept of force field analysis. Although Peck does not purport to be an expert on resistance to change, some of his ideas might be applicable in staff development when

America's tendency to worship youth and scorn old age is taken into account. In an effort to initiate school improvement, perhaps Peck's positive educational dictums and his dour warning regarding the path to senility will be taken seriously in this youth-oriented society and maybe there will be less resistance to change.

In his book, Ageless Body, Timeless Mind, Deepak Chopra stated:

As long as new perceptions continue to enter your brain, your body can respond in new ways. There is no secret of youth more powerful. As one 80-year old patient of mine succinctly put it, "People don't grow old. When they stop growing, they become old." New knowledge, new skills, new ways of looking at the world keep mind and body growing, and as long as that happens, the natural tendency to be new at every second is expressed.²⁹

For any staff development program to be successful, the individuals involved must be open to change. Procedures and old ways of doing things must be adaptable.

Chopra defined adaptability as freedom from a conditioned response. This new way of looking at things "is a choice that involves definite personal skills; for left to inertia, the mind tends to reinforce its old habits and increasingly to fall prey to its conditioning."³⁰ In the interest of possible higher academic standards and improved educational results, staff members might be encouraged to open themselves up to greater change by continuing to accept what is new, and welcome the unknown.

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CHAPTER 2

SELECTED REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The following bodies of literature were used to support this study:

- (a) literature on the subject of cultural literacy
- (b) literature by and about African-Americans
and
- (c) literature pertaining to staff development and action research.

Literature on Cultural Literacy

The following section explains the importance of cultural literacy for reading comprehension and improved test scores. According to studies completed by Richard Anderson of the Center for Reading Research at the University of Illinois, and other researchers in psycholinguistics, firm conclusions were reached concerning the importance of background knowledge in reading. They found that otherwise literate audiences failed tests in reading texts, not because of inadequate vocabulary comprehension, phonics or world recognition; the problem was cultural literacy.

“Anderson and others showed that to read a text with understanding one needs to have the background knowledge that the author has tacitly assumed the reader to have. This tacit knowledge is fundamental to literacy.”¹ If tacit knowledge is connected to the real divisions in American and world society, then students must be equipped to make that connection. On one hand, this tacit

knowledge can ease communication but on the other, it limits what can be communicated.

Deploring the vacuous and impoverished minds of many of our young people who are entering college, Bloom compared them to students of the past and stated:

Most students could be counted on to know the Bible, that ubiquitous source of the older traditions. In America it was not filtered through great national interpreters, but approached directly in the manner of early Protestantism, every man his own interpreter. The Bible was thus a mirror of that indifference to national cultures inherent in the American method. Most students also participated in a remarkably unified and explicit political tradition that possesses one writing known to everyone and probably believed by most, the Declaration of Independence.²

According to Bloom, religion, the other element of fundamental learning, has disappeared. Although respect for the Sacred (the latest fad) has soared, real religion and knowledge of the Bible have decreased to the vanishing point. Bloom mused that despite the mumbled Lord's Prayer and the recited Pledge of Allegiance, he and his childhood classmates were more affected by the home and the houses of worship.

These were the abodes of true religion. A large part of the family bond and its substantial content could be attributed to the holy days, "the common language and set of references that permeated most households." Children's imaginations were fired by stories of Moses and the Ten Commandments, and Jesus and his teaching of brotherly love.³

Passages from the Psalms and the gospels echoed in children's heads. Attending church or

synagogue, praying at the table, were a way of life, inseparable from the moral education that was supposed to be the family's special responsibility in this democracy. Actually, the moral teaching was the religious teaching. There was no abstract doctrine. The things one was supposed to do, the sense that the world supported them and punished disobedience, were all incarnated in the Biblical stories. The loss of the gripping inner life vouchsafed those who were nurtured by the Bible must be primarily attributed not to our schools or political life, but to the family which, with all its rights to privacy, has proved unable to maintain any content of its own. The dreariness of the family's spiritual landscape passes belief. . . . The delicate fabric of the civilization into which the successive generations are woven has unraveled, and children are raised, not educated.⁴

Bloom maintained that even in the so-called "happy" American families in which there are two caring and loving parents, the parents have "nothing to give their children in the way of a vision of the world, of high models of action or profound sense of connection with others"⁵ Essentially, Bloom stated that the cause of the family's basic role as the transmitter of tradition is the same as that of the decay of the humanities in that nobody believes that the old books do, or even could, contain the truth. So books have become, at best, "culture," i.e., boring.

In the United States, practically speaking, the Bible was the only common culture, one that united simple and sophisticated, rich and poor, young and old, and--as the very model of things, as well as the key to the rest of Western art, the greatest works of which were in one way or another responsive to the Bible--provided access to the seriousness of books. With its gradual and inevitable disappearance, the very idea of such a total book and the possibility and necessity of world-explanation in disappearing. And fathers and mothers have lost the idea that the highest aspiration they might have for their children is for them to be wise--as priests, prophets or philosophers are wise. Specialized

competence and success are all that they can imagine. Contrary to what is commonly thought, without the book even the idea of the order of the whole is lost.⁶

Reminiscing on his family standards and spiritually rich past, Bloom explained that there had been a reverence for learning because of its link to life. “This is what a community, and a history mean, a common experience inviting high and low into a single body of belief.”⁹ Bloom conceded that the Bible is not the sole means to equip a mind, “but without a book of similar gravity, read with the gravity of the potential believer, it will remain unfurnished.”¹⁰

Bloom further added that in order to refine the mind’s eye, high level literature--grandiose in nature--is necessary to constitute real taste and enable people to discern “the delicate distinctions among men, among their deeds and their motives”¹¹ He espoused the philosophers: Rousseau, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche as “thinkers of the very highest order” and emphatically admonished: “We must relearn what this means and also that there are others who belong in the same rank.”¹²

Essentially, Henry Louis Gates Jr. corroborated that admonition when he emphatically denounced the Eurocentric prejudice perpetrated against Black literature. He described this inequity as “hegemonic bias” that the study of literature can do without and contended that since neither Europeans nor Americans invented literature and its theory, they should not have a monopoly on its development. In fact, Gates indirectly alluded to the possibility of the great American writer being not only Black, but also a Black woman.¹³

E.D. Hirsch described literate culture as “the most democratic culture in our land” because it excludes no one. Although literate culture may not be a person’s first culture, it should be, according to Hirsch, everyone’s second, transcending the “narrow spheres of family, neighborhood, and region.” Membership in this culture is not contingent upon race or class, but is:

. . .automatic if one learns the background information and the linguistic conventions that are needed to read, write, and speak effectively. Although everyone is literate in some local, regional, or ethnic culture, the connection between mainstream culture and the national written language justifies calling mainstream culture the basic culture of the nation.¹⁴

After wide publication of the reports of the alleged precipitous Scholastic Aptitude Test score decline, over a ten-year period, public concern and furor were aroused about the quality of education. In no way was there a hint that this decline of SAT scores could be attributed to a decay in the quality of reading material assimilated by students.¹⁵ Instead, the celebrated test score decline fueled demands for basic skills, critical thinking skills, reading skills, vocabulary-building, and a host of other nonliterary, content-free exercises.”¹⁶

In modern day America, the average reader--not just the college-educated reader--is expected to possess an abundant supply of literary and historical knowledge accessible for making sense of every day reading.¹⁷

To the extent that we--educators, parents, and citizens--allow cultural literacy to wane and to be reduced only to knowledge of celebrities from People magazine and the electronic media, then the audience for genuine literature will shrink, material written or produced for a literate public will dwindle, and the quality of public discourse and debate in our society will suffer. It is a

tragic downward spiral that can only erode the culture, trivialize the intellect, and in time pauperize our civic life.¹⁸

Ravitch and Finn, in the section of their book entitled "A Generation At Risk," contended that the most disturbing finding of the literature assessment was not based on the low performance on any specific section, but on the dearth in general cumulative knowledge. Students did not recognize many of the common allusions--particularly those drawn from mythology and the Bible--regularly appearing in serious literature.¹⁹

At one time, classical mythology was taught to all children (not just the gifted) in all American schools, said Ravitch and Finn. Certain allusions--Pandora's Box, Achilles' heel, Midas touch--were part of everyday expressions. Virtually every student could explain the meaning of a Trojan horse or the face that laughed a thousand ships.

The results of this assessment suggest that this kind of background information can no longer be taken for granted by writers and speakers, even by editorial cartoonists. Similarly, knowledge of key biblical references, once universal regardless of one's religion or lack of it, seems to be slipping away. If students had been asked to identify rock stars or sports celebrities, their scores would doubtless have been far higher. But by the time the results were published, the stars and celebrities of the day would already have changed. Besides, what sort of society has in common only its celebrities of the moment?²⁰

Children should be taught Greek and Roman mythology and Bible stories, not merely to increase their knowledge of references and allusions, but also to provide

universal resonance. These stories have survived for thousands of years because they teach, inform, inspire, and entertain. They should not be part of an “elite culture,” but they should be taught to all children.²¹

Good literature should not be reserved for those who are already privileged. The average and slow students have as much right to be educated to enjoy and understand good literature as do the children who are bound for college. . . Schools in a democratic society have an obligation. . . to eliminate ignorance and not to distribute knowledge along social class lines.²²

To ensure this equal distribution of knowledge, an exhaustive effort to engage students on their own level of interest might be a wise move. In his chapter entitled “Natural Therapy,” Kegan maintained that “the single most important contribution developmental theory makes. . . is the exposure of the child’s ‘natural curriculum’.”²³ This is “an active process of meaning-making which informs and contrasts the child’s purposes.”²⁴ Its basic tenet is that children are not passive receptacles of appealing curricula. Teachers and curriculum designers are urged “first to recognize the agenda upon which the child is already embarked and which the teacher can only facilitate or thwart, but not himself [or herself] invent.”²⁵

Many characteristics or abilities that have been regarded as talents require long periods of development to bring to a high level. In Human Characteristics and School Learning, Benjamin Bloom wrote:

Some require very early development followed by long periods of specialized learning and encouragement. Great musical skill may require early encouragement and learning opportunities followed by systematic training over long periods of time. Similarly, mathematical ability, complex psychomotor abilities,

great verbal facility, and many other complex and highly developed types of competence may require some combination of early learning opportunities (before age six) followed by highly skilled teaching or tutoring, followed by systematic development and practice over a number of years.²⁶

In order for each member of society to develop some special talent in the arts--writing, painting, sculpture, music, dance or drama--early encouragement and systematic development are necessary. Benjamin Bloom stated that "the main import of the entire book is that human nature is not the barrier to educational and cultural development that philosophers, politicians, social scientists, and educators have frequently alleged...."²⁷

According to Benjamin Bloom, "societies in the past have relied largely on prediction and selection of talent as the means for securing a small group of well-educated persons."²⁸ Using legal and social pressures which require individuals to attend school for a minimum of ten to twelve years, modern societies stress the development of many well-educated persons.²⁹ Traditionally, the basis for determining that small group of well-educated or cultured people was a narrow European-Judeo-Christian-Greco-Roman standard. The common canon should be inclusive rather than exclusive of Black culture. In addition to that, the student's natural inclinations should be acknowledged and utilized as much as possible in the learning process.

A society which, through job requirements and college prerequisites, places such a high premium on education that it requires the individual to attend school for long periods must find the means to make schools attractive and meaningful for

individual learners. Modern societies no longer can be contented with the selection of talent as opposed to finding the means for developing talent.

The lead should come from each person's natural inclinations. In "Art for Art's Sake," Alfie Kohn stated that "parents push their gifted children into areas that bore them. Employers consider an applicant's experience and expertise but rarely think to ask what sort of work excites him or her."³⁰ If people feel motivated primarily by the interest, enjoyment, satisfaction and challenge of the work itself, and not by external pressures, they will be most creative.³¹ This creativity could enhance self-esteem and serve as a link to general cultural literacy.

Literature by and About African-Americans

The purpose of examining the literature that follows is to show its viability as an additional conduit in providing an incentive for African-American students to read the so-called "classics."

In Culture and Poverty, Charles A. Valentine cited America's need of an ethnography of its poor and its minorities. He reiterated Kenneth Clark's assessment of his experiences when he returned to the Dark Ghetto of his own origins. Essentially, Clark learned that in order to understand Harlem, one must seek and accept the truth, despite its paradoxes, ironies, aspects of comedy and tragedy, and most of all, its humanity.³² Clark approached his study as "an involved observer."³³ Valentine stated, Clark was the first to recognize and demonstrate that

the cultural-deprivation approach all too easily serves as one more of the 'subtle forms of social class and racial snobbery and ignorance,' and that it thus

becomes 'an alibi for educational neglect' and so contributes to 'the perpetuation of inferior education for lower-status children, whether their lower status is socio-economic or racial.'³⁴

Defining culture as the entire way of life followed by a people, Valentine said that culture is specifically "everything that one must learn to behave in ways that are recognizable, predictable, and understandable" to a particular people.³⁵ According to him, the idea of culture has been a most important weapon in the intellectual attack against racism, ethnocentrism, bigotry, and cultural imperialism.

Bernard Bell maintained that African-American culture whose historical roots emanate from the deep South

and the dynamics of sex, ethnicity, and class, means in this context the symbolic and material expression by black Americans of their relationship by nature, the black community, and the white community as they seek to adapt to their environment in order first to survive and then to thrive, both individually and collectively. Culture thus signifies the constitutive social process by which people create specific, different ways of life as they adapt to environmental conditions and historical circumstances.³⁶F

Expressing a similar view held by John Hope Franklin in From Slavery to Freedom, Bell explained that this process of acculturation for Black Americans has been molded by "a distinctive history--Africa, slavery, the South, Emancipation, Reconstruction, Northern migration and urbanization and most important, racism--" resulting in such processes as "double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision that best explain the complex, creative dynamics of black American culture and character."³⁷

Speaking about Black Americans, Valentine quoted Ralph Ellison:

Culturally this people represents one of the many subcultures which make up that great amalgam of European and native American cultures which is the culture of the United States. This "American Negro culture" is expressed in a body of folklore, in the musical forms of the spirituals, the blues and jazz; and idiomatic version of American speech. . . . a cuisine; a body of dance forms and even a dramaturgy which is generally unrecognized because still tied to the more folkish Negro churches.³⁸

Ellison's description echoes DuBois's succinct and poetic essay on Africa's cultural contributions to the world. In his chapter entitled "Of The Sorrow Songs" in The Souls of Black Folk, Dubois expounded:

And so by fateful chance the Negro folk song-- the rhythmic cry of the slave stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.³⁹

In his chapter on "Cultural Leadership and Cultural Democracy," Harold Cruse criticized Gilbert Seldes, author of The Seven Lively Arts, who alleged that Negro music and musicians could not hope to rise to "classic" stature.⁴⁰ Cruse maintained that Gilbert Seldes and other cultural critics had

severely distorted native American artistic standards by over-glorifying obsolete European standards. Seldes debased Negro creative artists by refusing to accept their originality as truly American because it was not European, but Afro-American.⁴¹

Carter G. Woodson stated that in regard to races, there was no evidence of inferiority or superiority. The difference in the races are indications of certain inherent gifts that the others do not have.⁴² By developing these gifts, every race can and must justify its right to existence.⁴³

From an historical perspective regarding art and entertainment, Carter G. Woodson reminded Blacks, or as he termed them, “the American Negro” of Ira Aldridge’s success as a famous Shakespearean actor and of Paul Robeson’s successful portrayal of Othello. He lamented the lack of courage of most Blacks who (at that time) were contented as comedians and ordinary clowns and who had not transcended the unnatural barriers to occupy higher ground.⁴⁴

Describing the reluctance of many Blacks to aspire to mental freedom and greater heights of achievement, Woodson mused:

. . . if you can control a man’s thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one.⁴⁵

According to recent discoveries, Woodson stated, Africa has contributed about as much as Europe to the progress of mankind, even influencing “the early civilization of the Mediterranean world.”⁴⁶ Educators might increase their effectiveness if they

heeded Woodson's advice for educating the Negro. He stated that it is necessary to know the background of the Negro,

what he is today, what his possibilities are, and how to begin with him as he is and make him a better individual of the kind that he is. Instead of cramming the Negro's mind with what others have shown that they can do, we should develop his latent powers that he may perform in society a part of which others are not capable.⁴⁷

Woodson cited examples of people who were or were not successful in educating or helping a particular ethnic group by whether or not they properly related to and understood that group. He advocated the study of the targeted ethnic group's language and culture as well as their specific proclivities.⁴⁸ Woodson also felt that it was incumbent upon Blacks, whether they were in Africa or America, to "be directed toward a serious examination of the fundamentals of education, religion, literature, and philosophy" as they have been presented to them.⁴⁹

As stated, studying or at least being familiar with a targeted group's language is not a bad idea. When asked about his views on Black English, Kunjufu retorted that it is a legitimate dialect with "rules and can be understood".⁵⁰ He cited a court case in Ann Arbor, Michigan in which a parent won a lawsuit against a local school district. With the assistance of author and professor, Geneva Smitherman, the parent, convinced the judge of the legitimacy of Black English.

The judge ruled that Black English not only needed to be acknowledged but it also needs to be understood without an accompanying negative value judgement. Therefore, a teacher should allow a child to converse either in Black English or standard English, without fear of condemnation.⁵¹

The basic premise here is that a five-year old child emerging from a home where all he or she has heard is Black English should not meet with abrupt condemnation on the first day of school. Such an experience can be quite shattering and damaging to his or her self-esteem. As further reinforcement of that viewpoint, Kunjufu mentioned Shavi Ali's book in which her research included her work with children who were allowed to speak or write in their natural dialect "and then rewrite the paragraph in standard English."⁵²

Foundations for Learning in Denver has also published books and manuals that take into consideration the richness of Black dialect. The organization urges children to use their own language and motivates them to write. Foundations for Learning is based on the concept of taking children where they are with their culture and using language arts--writing, speaking, reading, and listening--to develop a relevant curriculum.⁵³

In 1959, Johnson, detecting a growing interest in Black history and culture, authorized "a path-finding Black history series." As a result of the enthusiastic response, Lerone Bennett's Before the Mayflower was published and "became one of the most widely read Black history books ever."⁵⁴ Much of the material in Bennett's book is very relevant and might be motivational.

Certainly, this material presented in Bennett's book is informative for all Americans. He contended: "It is already reasonable, in fact, to believe that the African ancestors of American blacks were among the major benefactors of the human race."⁵⁵ The surviving evidence clearly shows that "Africans were on the scene and acting when the human drama opened."⁵⁶ Civilization had its origins "in

the great river valleys of Africa and Asia in the Fertile Crescent in the Near East and along the narrow ribbon of the Nile in Africa.”⁵⁷

From the inception of the human race, and for ages since, Black people led the “emerging human procession.”⁵⁸ Not just Black Americans, but all Americans need to know that Blacks transcended many boundaries as they founded empires and states. They made critical discoveries and noteworthy contributions that ushered in the modern world.⁵⁹ During this auspicious period in man’s evolution, Blacks gained honor and recognition throughout the ancient world.⁶⁰

Homer, Herodotus, Pliny, Diodorus and other classical writers repeatedly praised the Ethiopians. “The annals of all the great early nations of Asia Minor are full of them, “Flora Louisa Lugard wrote. “The Mosaic records allude to them frequently; but while they are described as the most powerful, the most just, and the most beautiful of the human race, they are constantly spoken of as black, and there seems to be no other conclusion to be drawn, than that at that remote period of history, the leading race of the Western world was a black race.”⁶¹

In fact, centuries later, as the Sudanese civilization prospered--Ghana, Mali and then Songhay, Timbuktu became the cultural mecca of the ancient world. Songhay’s greatest king, Askia Mohammed who seized power in 1493, reigned brilliantly and compassionately, developing Gao Walata, Timbuktu and Jenne into thriving intellectual centers.⁶² During Askia’s reign, Timbuktu was a city of opulence which comprised a population of 100,000 people. It was one “of the most fabled and exotic cities in the medieval world,” and this “Sudanese metropolis was

celebrated for its luxury and gaiety.”⁶³ There at the University of Sankore in Timbuktu, young people came

from all over the Moslem world to study law and surgery. . . The University of Sankore and other intellectual centers in Timbuktu had large and valuable collections of manuscripts in several languages, and scholars came from far-away places to check their Greek and Latin manuscripts.⁶⁴

Advocating the need for literary and historical truth by Black writers, Rudine Sims quoted Killens’s challenge: “Along with the fight to desegregate the entire cultural statement of America: we must desegregate the minds of the American people.”⁶⁵

On the subject of spiritual strivings, W.E.B. DuBois said: “This, then is the end of his strivings, to be a coworker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to be husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten.”⁶⁶ Although these words were said at a time when avenues of expression were much more constricted than today, this observation is noteworthy. Expounding on the training of Black men, DuBois stated that the central aim in the establishment of Hampton Insitute (which was still a high school), Fisk University, and Spelman Seminary, was to give teachers and leaders

. . . .the best practicable training and above all, to furnish the black world with adequate standards of life. It was not enough that the teachers of teachers should be trained in technical normal methods; they must also, so far as possible, be broad-minded, cultured men and women, to scatter civilization among a people whose ignorance was not simply of letters, but of life itself.⁶⁷

In the passage from "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," DuBois insisted that African Americans needed schools and civil rights and freedom to think: "Work, culture, liberty--all these we need, not singly but together, not successively but together, each growing and all striving toward that vaster ideal of human brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of Race. . . ."68

Dubois reiterated a basic humanity of Black people. Blacks must have all the rights of any people. He believed his people to be "especially gifted in the arts and particularly in music;" he viewed them "as compassionate and given to service, to unselfishness--these qualites" emanating from their often harrowing experiences.⁶⁹ What was then a plea, has in recent times, become a demand for equal rights in all areas of life.

In Black Rage, Cobbs and Grier bemoaned the wounds and scars inflicted on Black people, but maintained that they had a secret--their genius in surviving. In their adaptations to adversity, they developed a vigorous lifestyle which

has touched religion, music, and the broad canons of creativity. The psyche of black men has been distorted, but out of that deformity has risen a majesty. It began in the chants of the first work song. It continues in the timelessness of the blues. For white America to understand the life of the black man, it must recognize that so much time has passed and so little has changed.⁷⁰

According to Cobbs and Grier cultural anthropologist have searched thoroughly and interminably without finding "contemporary evidence for the persistence of African patterns of culture." Cobbs and Grier observed that the

experience of slavery was incredibly “efficient in effacing the African and producing the American Negro.”⁷¹ Because of this, the American Negro whose history was destroyed, developed a unique culture which originated on American shores and provided “a living document of black history in America.”⁷² One such aspect is evident in the unusual ability of Black musicians who

have always sought to express something uniquely black and to express it in a way which leaves whites dumbfounded and excluded. Most popular music in America expresses this progressive change in the manner of expression of black musicians. No sooner have some whites learned the special techniques than Negro musicians develop a new, more difficult technique, and when that too can be shared by whites, another more complex idiom is developed. Any student of contemporary music can follow this evolution and will be impressed by the technical and theoretical developments black musicians have moved toward in response to the drive for a unique and ethnically singular method of expression.⁷³

Bernard Bell reiterated and touted this unflagging, persistent creativity of the African-American people. He stated that recent research in linguistics, anthropology, history, sociology, musicology and folklore supports a long-held belief by many African-Americans that the conflicts between White society and Black culture have resulted in both creative and destructive tensions in Black people and their communities. “Within the ethnic group, Blacks are disciplined to internalize these tensions or to transform the aborted social energy into cultural energy and expression.”⁷⁴

Bell continued his discussion of that cultural energy and expression in forms of creativity, and maintained that in legend, myth, tale, oratory, music or song are definite identifiable residual oral forms traditional of the "Afro-American novel." Patriotic songs, work songs, abolitionist songs, ragtime, spirituals, blues, jazz, gospel--especially, the last three, are viable structural and thematic components of individual novels, "from Brown's Clotel to Baldwin's If Beale Street Could Talk (1974) and Just Above My Head (1979).⁷⁵ Bell explained:

The spirituals, like chanted sermons, are inspired by the Bible, informed by the group experience, and characterized by that old-time religion, especially the emotional fervor of the Holiness church. Gospels are the sacred modern continuation in song of the story of the black experience in the city, paradoxically characterized by features of both the spirituals and blues. The strong beat, ambiguous imagery, and wide tonal range of gospel songs were significantly influenced by the pioneer compositions of Thomas A. Dorsey, a convert from the blues tradition..⁷⁶

In 1899, James Weldon Johnson and his brother, Rosamond collaborated in writing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to commemorate Abraham Lincoln's birthday. Later, this song became famous as "The Negro National Anthem." Bell maintained that James Weldon Johnson's success as a poet and songwriter can be partially attributed to his firm belief that if Negroes demonstrated intellectual parity with White people through a proliferation of literature and art, this effort would be instrumental in eliminating White racism.⁷⁷

Referring to the outbursts and protests of the sixties, Valentine argued that poor people and their supporters demanded equality in such areas as economic

welfare, and "all the material and psychic benefits of membership in our society."⁷⁸

No measure of minimal income support, whether in the form of welfare payments or as guaranteed sustenance, could solve the basic problem of inequality.⁷⁹

Reducing inequality does not mean what has come to be called 'equal opportunity.'

It means equitability of results in the sense of achievement, fulfillment, and enjoyment of the rewards and satisfactions already generally available to citizens outside disadvantaged groups."⁸⁰

As social psychologist Robert Kegan has observed, middle-class white men permeate academic consideration of human development. He believed that there is a "tacit ideology that is so powerful and insidious for those it excludes: it cannot be seen; it is not held up for examination"; however, as a result of the upheavals of the past fifteen years--the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the antiwar movement--the ideological nature of American life became clearer.⁸¹

Although Hirsch and Bloom have made the case for the importance of establishing a base for civilized communication, Bloom and many other critics in fine arts have established a narrow European-Judeo-Christian-Greco-Roman definition of high culture. They, along with most of White American society, appear to have ignored the many contributions of Africans, Asians, Latin-Americans, and African-Americans. Conversely, Hirsch advocated a kind of multicultural awareness:

To acknowledge the importance of minority and local cultures of all sorts, to insist on their protection and nurture, to give them demonstrations of respect in the public sphere are traditional aims that should be stressed even when one is concerned. . . with national

culture and literacy. . . but it is for all of us to decide what "American" means on the other side of the hyphen in Italo-American or Asian-American.⁸²

Although Hirsch's suggestion is acknowledged, the prevalent artistic conception has until very recently, been very narrow and biased. In quoting Valentine on Ellison, Bell, DuBois, Cruse (on Seldes), Woodson, Johnson, Kunjufu, Bennett, Sims, Cobbs and Grier, Kegan, and Hirsch, this blatant inequity has been pinpointed.

Literature Pertaining to Staff Development and Action Research

By employing the tenets and strategies espoused in the literature that follows, students can be motivated to learn. Based on his belief that all children are eminently educable and that the behavior of the school is critical in determining the quality of that education, Ronald Edmonds espoused equity, defined as a simple sense of fairness in the distribution of the primary goods and services that characterize our social order.

Edmonds maintained that inequity in American education derives first and foremost from society's failure to educate children from poor families, imparting to them the basic skills that assure pupils successful access to the next level of school. Using that as what he calls a "modest standard," he contended that "schools that teach children of the poor are dismal failures."⁸³

Defending the thesis of What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? by Finn and Ravitch, Paul Gagnon, in his article entitled "Content Counts," stated that the central message is the need for, and the elemental justice of, equality of educational

opportunity.⁸⁴ It would seem logical to heed his admonition that the time has come for “American educators to recognize that a decisively higher level of political and cultural literacy is both the birthright of every child and indispensable to the health of our democratic society.”⁸⁵

While American educators need to exert a concerted effort to reach the forementioned goals, they can accomplish this aim and other goals as well by pooling their resources and sharing ideas and successful teaching techniques. Seymour Sarason stated that “teaching is a lonely profession.”⁸⁶ Sarason has pointed out that teachers--especially new ones--have tended to feel lonely and inadequate, while “harboring hostility to administrators who seemed insensitive to the teacher’s plight.”⁸⁷

In their classrooms, teachers are relatively autonomous, and within a school they have surprisingly little to do with each other. Frequently, “teachers within a group do not feel themselves to be part of a working or planning group.”⁸⁸ Although they may identify with each other in terms of role and place of work, and they may feel loyalty to each other and the school, they “rarely feel part of a working group that discusses, plans, and helps make educational decisions.”⁸⁹ Presumably, inner-city teachers feel even more alienated than most, as they work in an environment that is unpredictable and potentially dangerous.⁹⁰

An article in the winter, 1984 edition of The American Teacher, entitled “Teacher Isolation; Barrier to Professionalism,” by Susan J. Rosenholtz and Susan J. Kyle, very poignantly expressed their ideas on this subject. Essentially, the article

deals with a common but serious malady that has infected many schools--teacher isolation.⁹¹

Spending much of their time cut off from their co-workers, neither seeing nor hearing others teach, many teachers report no adult contacts during the day.

Alienation often results from the sense of one's inability to affect one's environment. This sense of professional futility is often felt among urban teachers.⁹²

Without professional dialogue, teachers' skill acquisition and development become stunted, thereby affecting the instructional services delivered to students.

Volumes of research attest to the fact that within industrial settings greater alienation of workers is associated with diminished productivity. The same should be true even more powerfully of teachers whose work is often more complex, less measurable, and less closely supervised.

....Like their teachers, students will withdraw effort when making an effort seems futile.⁹³

Often, one genuine, problematic element in the lives of many inner-city young people is the difficulty in convincing themselves that they can in fact exert some control with a positive influence on their destiny.⁹⁴

In noneducational activities, a great deal is known about what occurs when workers have more input and gain more authority over their work. Payne quoted

Blumberg:

"There is scarcely a study in the entire literature which fails to demonstrate that satisfaction in work is enhanced. . . or productivity increases accrue from a genuine increase in workers' decision-making power." Findings of such consistency. . . are rare. . . Conversely, we also know that the alienation of teachers and parents encouraged by the present structure can be inimical to even a minimal sense of responsibility and virtually

precludes the full employment of any individual's full creative and productive capacity. It generates apathy where we most need a sense of personal involvement.⁹⁵

Because teacher isolation is costly in terms of professional development and ultimately, student learning, it should be reduced. Some opportunities for professional development that might serve as possible solutions could be group planning and teacher empowerment in curriculum decision-making. Without professional dialogue, teachers seldom develop common goals and means to attain them. When isolated teachers are forced to construct their own conception of professional excellence and the method of achieving it, teaching goals become strikingly individualistic. Essentially, what occurs are countless reinventions of the wheel. Successful teaching strategies become single, isolated triumphs, neither noted nor shared with others. Lessons that prove unsuccessful for specific populations of students are doomed to endless repetition for lack of better ideas that could be produced collectively and shared by teachers.⁹⁶

When teaching objectives are not shared, individual teachers will point their efforts toward improvement in completely different directions, making staff development at the school level an almost impossible task. This isolation results in a vicious circle; without common goals, teachers have little reason to engage one another in the professional dialogue essential for agreeing on common goals.⁹⁷

Symptomatic of teacher isolation are the following: 1) Beginning teachers often defect from teaching, citing doubts about their ability to succeed with students and a lack of opportunity for professional growth and development. They also

experience conflict with principal or colleagues and difficulty in dealing effectively with student misbehavior. 2) Veteran teachers feel stuck or professionally stifled with no input for their professional development. They also experience teacher “burn-out.”

The most effective schools are those in which the learning of both teachers and students is greater as a result of teacher collaboration. Specifically, teachers who collaborate begin to feel that the “difficult” student can be reached. This prompts them to search for and test new teaching ideas. For veteran teachers, collaborative settings offer a continual source of renewal and rejuvenation. One person’s ideas can build upon another’s, in essence, producing a better joint product than either could have come to individually.

Payne contended that innovation is threatening enough in general to those teachers who feel they have little influence over their lives. This point, Payne explained, was discussed at length by James Comer (1980). According to Payne, Comer implied “that where teachers are more vitally a part of the planning and implementation of reform, teacher commitment to the success of reform will be more substantial.”⁹⁸

What can prove to be quite advantageous would be a strong encouragement of collaboration on two basic levels within the school; cooperative learning among students, and cooperative planning and sharing among teachers. Julius and Zelda Segal (in their article entitled “The Powerful World of Peer Relationships”) admonished teachers and parents to heed the psychological power of peers, by

acting as “enthusiastic matchmakers between children and rewarding friends.”⁹⁹

They say that the next generation will be served best if the power of our children’s peers is accepted and their presence recognized in an effort to work with rather than against them.¹⁰⁰

Discussing various methods of cooperative learning in: “Learning Together,” Robert E. Slavin stated that positive efforts of cooperative learning are not limited to high or low achievers but benefit all students. Besides the outcome of increased achievement, “researchers have also found that after participating in cooperative learning activities, students have improved attitudes toward their classmates, particularly those from different ethnic backgrounds” and “student self-esteem is typically significantly enhanced as a result of cooperative learning.”¹⁰¹

Alluding to Robert Slavin’s description of the typical classroom in his book, Cooperative Learning, Kunjufu emphatically recommended cooperative learning. Kunjufu cited Slavin’s example of a situation in which two students were participating in class. Billy’s embarrassment, when he offered an erroneous answer, was exacerbated by Sam’s correct answer to the question, which does not really “help” Billy.¹⁰²

After delineating the strategies employed by Johnson and Johnson for effective cooperative learning, Kunjufu touted its successes.¹⁰³ Often, a student who works hard on an academic task, is labeled a teacher’s pet or a nerd. These student-imposed norms can discourage academic progress. On the other hand, when students collaborate on a common goal, academic work becomes a valued and

accepted activity. Like the hard work valued by peers in sports because of the credit received by the team, so also is the academic work valued by peers in cooperative learning.¹⁰⁴ This method promotes encouragement among both the higher and lower achieving students as the teacher's lecture and notes become part of their frame of reference. As a result of this, discipline problems are often reduced.

Teachers spend less time saying, "Do your own work, don't talk to your neighbor, don't help." The students learn communication and leadership skills, group decision making and conflict management.¹⁰⁵

According to Kunjufu, one major benefit is that in a traditional class, students wish for and gloat over each other's failure while in the cooperative learning class, they "help each other succeed."¹⁰⁶

The cooperative method is not being recommended at the exclusion of individual assignment and lecturing. It is simply another strategy whose benefits are significant--specifically the incorporation of positive peer pressure for academic achievement.¹⁰⁷ If educators believe that they "can make a difference and that family demographics, school per pupil expenditures, and innate ability are not the issues," then perhaps they will be motivated to employ these strategies and techniques to inculcate and infiltrate these values into the student peer group.¹⁰⁸

Citing the experience of a Black journalist, E. Sargent of the Washington Post, Kunjufu quoted Sargent who, in essence, counteracted the negative peer pressure directed at him as a young man. His public school teachers rarely mentioned the contributions of Blacks in science, math, and other academic areas. Those teachers, according to Sargent, never talked about educational methods

Blacks could use collectively to solve the social and great economical problems affecting the race.¹⁰⁹

Because Sargent knew that Blacks had made an indelible impact on every facet of American life, everything became relevant. He was compelled to transcend the barriers imposed by narrow-minded people who, for instance, claimed that classical music was the domain of White people only. Sargent explained that his knowledge of the speculation that Beethoven was a Black man--a mulatto--enhanced his enjoyment of classical music. When friends berated him for listening to White music," he countered their scornful remarks with a proud retort that Beethoven was a "brother." Because his taste in music encompassed boogie, rock, funk, jazz, rhythm and blues, Beethoven and Bach, he began to think of himself as bicultural and "super-advantaged" rather than disadvantaged.¹¹⁰

Kunjufu referred to another one of his books: Lessons from History: A Celebration in Blackness which is an articulation of what Sargent realized "should be the goal of all our youth." In his book, stated Kunjufu, he did not want to report history. He wanted to inspire Black youth with the personal story of the strengths and weaknesses of African-Americans.¹¹¹ Kunjufu maintained that more students need to be like E. Sargent. They must expand their options beyond the erroneous beliefs that "being cool is black and being smart is white."¹¹² These fallacious notions, attributing academic achievement with being White and poor achievement with acting Black, stem from what Kunjufu called a malady of slave mentality. The damage is so entrenched that the victim is unaware of the problem and consequently

is not motivated to find solutions. Black students have difficulty explaining the association of good grades with Whiteness and being cool with Blackness. Because they have trouble describing their own "inferiority," they conclude that it is not important.¹¹³

Kunjufu cited the following research results, showing that on the average, Asian-Americans out-score Europeans and African-Americans on the SAT:

Asian-Americans	925	
European-Americans	908	
African-Americans	728	114

A major factor in the above results is study time per week, outside of school hours:

Asian-Americans	12 hours	
European-Americans	8 hours	
African-Americans	6 hours	115

On the other hand, concerning television viewing time per week per household, the results are the reverse:

African-Americans	75 hours	
European-Americans	53 hours	
Asian-Americans	unable to be measured	

Kunjufu's strong recommendation was that television viewing should be closely monitored. "At the minimum, for every hour of television viewed, the equivalent time in study should be achieved."¹¹⁶

The research indicates that time on task, study time, and teacher expectations are more important than ability for improvement in academic achievement.¹¹⁷

Asian-Americans did not outscore European-and African-Americans because of more ability, but because they study more. African-Americans play

basketball better than other races because they practice more.¹¹⁸

According to Virginia Axline, an excessive number of gifted young people develop in an unbalanced and lopsided manner, falling victim to grief and loneliness. "Such superior intelligence creates serious problems of personal and social adjustments. It is necessary to meet all the child's basic needs and to provide appropriate, balanced outlets for the superior intelligence. . . ." ¹¹⁹

As previously stated, collaboration is important first and foremost, among staff members and then, of course, among students. Jones and Maloy described schools as social systems that are complex in nature and whose outcomes were seldom equitable--especially for students who are poor, minority or have special needs.¹²⁰

Schools proclaim equal opportunity and meritocratic standards while perpetuating a society differentiated by race, class, gender, religion, ethnic origin, region, and accepted values. Schools are age-segregated, teacher-dominated, bureaucratically scheduled, and norm-referenced institutions--although learning is none of the above.¹²¹

Teachers, in most schools, have become inured to existing conditions, seldom share their clinical expertise and ideas about curriculum, "and lack organization skills to adopt and adapt innovations over a sustained period of time." According to Jones and Maloy, professional development is dependent upon communication about weaknesses as well as strengths, and "accurate feedbacks about teaching, learning and school climate."¹²²

Often, good instructional practices are not discussed and teachers who volunteer for leadership roles are discouraged, falling victim to “rapid ‘burn out’ of enthusiasm.” Peer recognition is scarce for these teachers while their less successful colleagues apparently are protected by a tacit agreement. Overall instructional effectiveness and teacher improvement depend essentially “on teachers’ willingness to seek advice and fresh ideas, to enforce both high expectations and standards cooperatively, and to build a positive climate throughout their building.”¹²³

Hirsch said teachers are being trained only to impart skills. They are not expected to have gained expertise in any “particular, factual and traditional information or special academic discipline.”¹²⁴ It is a “tragically wasteful mistake” to miss the opportunity to teach young people the traditional information necessary in a literate culture. This mistake can deprive students of knowledge that they may find useful later in life. Such a blatant void can result in the inevitable

and gradual disintegration of cultural memory, causing a gradual decline in our ability to communicate. The mistake has therefore been a chief cause of illiteracy, which is a subcategory of the inability to communicate.¹²⁵

In their chapter called “The ‘Promise’ of Education,” Grier and Cobbs stated that children respond to the expectations of their environment, while reading clearly both the conscious and the unconscious message imparted to them.¹²⁷ Often, students “read” and “study” their teachers before they study their books, resulting in the syndrome of the “hidden curriculum.”

Reminiscing on his school days in Chicago--a far cry from Arkansas City (his birthplace), John H. Johnson shared his admiration for the assistant principal, a Black woman named Mrs. Annabel Carey Prescott. Her physical presence along with that of other Black teachers and administrators was more important than the lessons they taught.¹²⁸ He had never seen so many well-educated and well-dressed Blacks in one place. They reinforced the classroom lessons with their shared reflected light and admirable demeanor.¹²⁸

On the general subject of teacher expectations, Johnson recalled:

A self-perpetuating mythology would develop later around inner-city Black schools. Many people, including many educators, would buy into the damnable idea that poor Black students can't and won't learn. Our teachers didn't believe that. They believed we could do anything we wanted to do, and they challenged us to reach for the stars.¹²⁹

Johnson fondly described his former civics teacher, Mary J. Herricks, (who happened to be White), as a legend in Black Chicago. For the first time in his life, he learned something about Africa. She challenged the students to prepare themselves for the next lap of a great race as she informed them that they "were descendants of an ancient people who had created major civilizations in Africa."¹³⁰

For the people who worry about the future of public education, Johnson said:

. . . . The letter alone killeth but the spirit transforms disadvantaged youths and giveth new life.

There's nothing wrong with public education that more resources, more love. . . can't cure. And our most important task is to duplicate the nurturing, transforming environments that made it possible for unsung and underpaid teachers and administrators,

Black and White, to perform the educational miracles of yesterday.¹³¹

Johnson concluded his description of the ideal educational setting by stating that Mary Herricks taught as if her life and her students' lives depended on it.¹³²

The best-known attempt to assess the impact of teacher expectations on learning is Robert Rosenthal's and Lenore Jacobsen's Pygmalion in the Classroom (1968). Briefly, the researchers told teachers in an elementary school that they had developed a test to identify late-blooming students. Teachers were then given the names of students that in fact had been drawn randomly and were told that these students were about to "spurt ahead." At the end of the year, it turned out that those students for whom teachers' expectations had been artificially raised did in fact make more progress than a control group, with younger students and the more ethnic-looking students gaining most from heightened expectations.¹³³

This cited finding is not surprising, for much social behavior is shaped in dramatic and also subtle ways by the expectations of significant others. This idea has had a

long and fruitful history in social psychology, undergirding our understanding of how self-concept is formed, how placebo effects operate in medical research, how workers set productivity levels among themselves, and how racial stereotypes are sustained. . . Available evidence suggests that expectations influence both the quantity and quality of teaching.¹³⁴

Citing Jackson's Life in the Classroom (1980), Sarason described the "outstanding teacher" as possessing the following traits or characteristics:

1. immediacy - "an acute sensitivity to the 'here and now'" which is "a need for a state of constant vigilance".
2. informality which is "the opposite of an emphasis on undue routinization" and which emphasizes "the importance of freedom of movement and thought for children."
3. individuality "which 'deals with the teacher's interest in the well-being of individual students' in the class. Although the teacher "confronts the entire class, it is what happens to individuals that really counts."
4. autonomy which embodies a certain resilience or oblivious stance to inflexible curriculum or classroom invasion by administrative superiors whose main objectives are evaluations or observations.¹³⁵

In attempting a school improvement plan, it is absolutely essential that all groups of the school population are cognizant of and involved in each step of the process. As much as possible, there should be input from teachers, other staff members, and students, as well as administrators. Sarason pointed out that one major finding of a successful educational change in a study done by Bernman and McLaughlin was the requirement of serious and active participation on the part of the classroom teacher.¹³⁶ Sarason added that in a similar manner, Cowen and associates initiated a program in the Rochester Schools which emphasized "the centrality of the classroom teacher in planning and implementation."¹³⁷ Cowen

found that when he, unlike most proponents for change, altered the teacher's unusual feelings of powerlessness, he observed remarkable effects on the teacher's creativity, motivation, and industry.¹³⁸

A salient point that should not be overlooked, however, is that teachers, according to Cowen, tend to regard students in a way that lowers motivation and arouses hostility in teachers when their superiors regard them in the same manner. Students no longer were satisfied with being the traditional, passive, docile receptacles of learning. They demanded recognition and participation in and responsibility for their own formal education.

. . . Just as teacher militancy was perceived as a threat to the decision-making power of administrators and boards of education, and just as the militancy of community groups was perceived as a threat to the power of educators, so was the militancy of students perceived by school personnel¹³⁹

In other words, teachers should treat young people the way they themselves would like to be treated.

To briefly recapitulate, the basic concepts explored in this paper are essentially two that have been merged into one goal: the collaborative development of an English department resource area as a tool or link to cultural enhancement and general cultural literacy. This can be achieved by students, teachers, and administrators working together. Hopefully, this resource area will be a repository of ideas, tools and materials that are deemed important and or successful by staff members, new and veteran alike.

If and when these ideas come to fruition, the improvement will be effected by people working together. In a section entitled "The Redefinition of Resources," from his book's final chapter called "The Ends and Means of Change," Sarason contended:

As long as we continue unreflectively to define educational resources in the customary way, the goals of change cannot be met. that is to say, as long as we define resources in terms of people with credentials that can only be attained through years of education and training, we automatically create an unbridgeable gulf between means and ends."¹⁴⁰

Clearly, his emphasis is on using people as resources. "In a time of increasing expectations and diminishing resources for education, we cannot afford to ignore a powerful, free instructional resource available in any school: the students themselves!"¹⁴¹

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CHAPTER 3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

In the initial undertaking of this project, a seemingly inadvertant hindrance was a statement made by an individual. He quipped: "You need to do something that can be measured. How can you measure culture? Do something that deals with reading or writing." Because of his powerful position in the school, his quip might possibly have thwarted the ensuing study and implementation of this aspect of the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School's staff development program.

Possibly, he and others like him, suffer from what Peck termed "Scientific Tunnel Vision," a chapter in The Road Less Traveled. It is described as "a psychologically self-imposed psychological set of blinders which prevents them from turning their attention to the realm of the spirit."¹ Peck's contention is that on the subject of methodology, scientists have placed so much emphasis on measurement that it "has become a kind of scientific idol."²

Measurement, as a tool and a methodology, has resulted in "an attitude on the part of many scientists of not only skepticism but outright rejection of what cannot be measured."³ These scientists seem to convey the notion that what is immeasurable is of no consequence and unworthy of observation. They maintain that things which are difficult to study do not merit study and presumably should not be treated in a serious manner.⁴

In contrast, however, is an opposing point of view which comprises two main factors:

. . .one is the development of increasingly sophisticated methods of study. Through the use of hardware such as electron microscopes, spectrophotometers and computers, and software such as statistical techniques we are now able to make measurements of increasingly complex phenomena which a few decades ago were unmeasurable. The range of scientific vision is consequently expanding. . . The other development that is assisting us to escape from scientific tunnel vision is the relatively recent discovery by science of the reality of paradox.⁵

When the subject of cultural literacy was introduced among a group of teachers, many voiced a concern for "basic" literacy. This poignant observation is not unfounded and cannot be overlooked. Kunjufu lamented that "42 percent of all Black seventeen-year-olds" are "unable to read beyond a sixth grade level and the entire country" possesses "23 million functional illiterates."⁶ Although Kunjufu stated various reasons for this--change in technology and family structure, increase in television and the decline in values--he maintained that the major reason for this was the move away from the complete and systematic use of phonics as the primary source for the teaching of reading.⁷

Despite the fact that some reading specialists contend that literacy consists basically of mastering phonics and the mechanics of decoding along with word recognition, most reading experts now believe that reading ability with comprehension hinges on a bank of background knowledge.⁸ This latter view was expressed by the Commission on Reading in 1985 in a major report called

Becoming a Nation of Readers-jointly sponsored by the Center for the Study of Reading, the National Academy of Education, and the National Institute of Education. The Commission described reading as a process which combines information from a text and a reader's knowledge, acting together to produce meaning. Because no text is completely self-explanatory, readers must use their own stored knowledge on the subject of the text.⁹

It would follow then that if there is a dearth of stored knowledge, reading ability will be hindered. It also seems logical to assume that this scarcity in "world knowledge" or "cultural literacy" negatively affects achievement on teacher-made tests as well as standardized tests. Perhaps the results of the assessment made by the English teachers at the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School concerning students' needs are somehow connected.

Because of the deteriorating school conditions and low teacher morale, there is a great disparity between the intended methodology or procedure mentioned in the proposal for this project and the actual accomplishments stated in this dissertation. On Wednesday, November 28, 1991, a meeting of English teachers was planned in the library of the high school for after school, as this was the allocated time for departmental and faculty meetings. The purpose of this meeting was to assess the students' needs. Nine teachers had been notified and invited.

Naturally, this meeting was not mandatory, so two teachers showed up. The purpose of the meeting was explained and the assessment forms were given to them. After a brief discussion, the forms were completed and returned to the

researcher, who later placed assessment forms in the mailboxes of the absent teachers. Over a period of days with a bit of cajoling, a total of four completed forms were returned.

What follows are the results of the charted responses and then the individualized detailed assessments. Although the assessment form appears as an appendix to this dissertation, that form is also inserted here for the purpose of clarity and ease in correlating the responses with the questions.

Assessment - Students' Needs

Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School English Department

1. From a general perspective, do you feel that our students in the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School are achieving adequately on tests (both teacher-made and standardized)?
2. Do you feel that our students are comfortable or satisfied with their levels of achievement?
3. In what way have they indicated that to you?
4. Are you satisfied with their achievement levels?
5. Do you feel there is a need to refine this situation?
6. If such a need exists, what can we do about it? (Please feel free to elaborate.)
7. In general, do you feel that our students have high or low self-esteem?
8. Do you feel that there is a connection between their grades and their self-esteem?

9. Whether you have been in a formal or informal setting, what are some of the students' concerns that they have made known to you?
10. What were your reactions?

Obviously, the answers for questions 1,2,4,5,8 were "yes" or "no" answers, whereas the answers to the other questions were qualifying ones.

Teachers' Charted Responses

<u>Question Numbers</u>	<u>Answers of Yes</u>	<u>Answers of No</u>
1	0	4
2	1	3
3	-	-
4	0	4
5	5	0
6	-	-
7	-	-
8	3	1

9	-	-
10	-	-

Because numerous educators and parents are justifiably concerned about the staggering numbers of students who are reading below grade level, and consequently, underachieving academically, one result of this study was a current plan to share the above findings and ensuing research widely as well as locally.

Teachers' Written Responses

Below are the quoted responses from the four teachers (with reasons given in some cases to the questions on the assessment form (page 84). Following the teachers' statements are suggested methods and procedures for rectifying what staff members perceived as the most salient academic, disciplinary, and social deficits.

For the sake of anonymity, teachers' initials are used:

From N.J.

1. No. Why do the kids do so poorly on standardized tests? Standardized tests require work, effort, academic skills. . . because they are generally not at the academic level on which these tests are written.
2. Yes. They are not at the academic level where they are expected to be at most points in time.
3. They just want to get by. Students have expressed joy by passing with 70%. They are not consistently monitored at home nor school concerning academic skills (the kid is o.k. syndrome, pointing out shortcomings, deficits, weaknesses is seen as negative). If I had my way, I would demand that all vocabulary and spelling words be written at 3x each and essays etc. be rewritten or corrected.

4. No. They are always playing catch up, always suffering from increasing deficits.
5. Yes. Lack of academic support at home.
6. We can try to alleviate the confusion of values and try to offset the lack of proper training at home.
7. I feel that they have low self-esteem. Because of this, the teacher has to spend too much time on discipline, values, manners, etc. and not enough time is spent on task (academics).
8. Yes. There is an inability to see the connection between academics and life and effort in the classroom.
9. Most students just want to get over. They want to do as little as possible to pass and if they don't pass, that's o.k. too. There is an unwillingness to work and study--lack of motivation.
10. Frustration.

Solutions

1. Efforts to meet kids at their points of need e.g. use of high interest materials (e.g. sports, music, dance, movies, interpersonal relationships, teenage problems, etc.)
2. Also materials that are culturally-based
3. Courses in values clarification

From B.B.

1. No.
2. No.
3. Some have expressed dissatisfaction with report card grades. Some have given up trying rather than face possible failure.

4. No.

5. Yes.

6. ----

7. Low.

8. Yes.

9. Students have complained about the tone in the building, the lack of discipline, the frequent interruptions. One student said that grades earned here are not comparable to those received in other schools; the implication was that high grades here are not equivalent to average grades in other schools.

10. To those who complained about conditions in the school, I gave advice about what students could do to both cope with or help change the situation.

To the student who compared Roosevelt to other districts with respect to the level of achievement represented by grades, I explained that I could answer for myself only.

From L.F.

1. No.

2. No.

3. They haven't. I feel that since they are not all on honor rolls, maybe they aren't satisfied.

4. No.

5. Yes.

6. Attempt to develop a collaborative effort between school and home. To attempt to have students become more accountable for their actions.

To create genuine pride-in-performance.

To provide more "in-class" assistance for teachers who are experiencing problems in motivating students.

Teach more culturally-based material

7. Very difficult to ascertain with any kind of accuracy.
8. Definitely!
9. (1) No African-American History classes
(2) "Non-teaching" instruction
(3) Inconsistent regulations
10. Totally agree!!

From R.V.

1. Not at all. If our students were achieving adequately, why is it that the results on standardized testing are so poor? Regularly, test results show our students at the bottom or near the bottom by comparison to other districts.
2. Some students--the better skilled ones--are unhappy with their achievement levels, I feel. There are those who are complacent, feeling that their achievement is sufficient as long as they have passed. Still others exhibit complacency, even in light of failure. Perhaps the reason could be that they have experienced few occasions of success. They begin to see themselves as failures and have accepted the condition. A final example of another type of group is those students who work as hard as they can, yet their efforts produce few positive results.
3. The indication is evident in that our students have allowed the classroom to become a limiter for their learning. Few read voluntarily, other than classroom assignments. Students complain regularly of having too much work, yet we know that they are not coming close to covering the minimum State curriculum requirements. Their awareness of a need to improve becomes evident when they ask for extra work to help boost their grades. Last, perhaps, but not least is the fact that our students--in the main--do not use their time wisely.

4. Not all. The students can always do more and do better. If more work were completed in a positive, effective fashion, we would not have to spend precious time teaching young-timers how to take a test. They would have gained the knowledge and information and would know how to apply it.

5. Yes. The mere fact that Roosevelt generally winds up on the bottom of any list when standardized test results are published is proof that the situation needs rectifying.

6. I don't feel that it is necessarily what we--as teachers--can do about the situation presently, as much as, it is a condition which students and parents must recognize and they must want to change it. There is lack of interest and lack of support from the home. I am personally weary of hearing that teachers are responsible for student failure. There must be help and support from three areas--the teacher, the student and the parent. Students are not doing their part. I am not saying that there is perfect teacher performance; surely there is also weakness in our ranks. When we have students coming to us--on this level--who are ill equipped and lack basic skills, there is not a lot that we can contribute to the void within the constraints forced upon us. The main negative contributions being, large class sizes, monumental discipline problems and the time allotment within which we must work. The system's structure must be changed if we are to make a greater impact and achieve better results. I refuse to spend time developing new gimmicks and staging entertainment in order to have students learn simply because we are "supposed" to keep their attention. There is no short cut to education and they simply must learn to see it that way.

7. To watch them operate, there is nothing wrong with their self-esteem because they feel that they are quite knowledgeable. They don't know that they don't know (awkward, but this is exactly what I mean). They are unaware of their "true" levels by comparison to the best and average students.

8. No. In the main, I don't think they are aware, nor do they give it much thought. It's not "cool" to be smart or to be a good student. That notion, I feel, is generated by the amount of attention given to unruly students here, as opposed to time given and attention spent on the better students.

9. Some concerns that I have heard are:

- A. that this is not a "real" school
- B. discipline is almost non-existent
- C. you can get away with anything and no one can stop you, nor does anyone care
- D. rules are not enforced
- E. that security personnel gets too friendly with the kids
- F. repeat offenders should be put out of school-expelled
- G. that they don't get a good education at Roosevelt
- H. too many interruptions on the P.A. system
- I. that the unruly students should be taken out of this setting

10. I generally agree.

Literary Relevance and Autobiographical Anecdotes as Change Strategies

From the above assessments, some of the blatant inadequacies have been pinpointed and presented with concomitant possible improvement procedures. It is feasible to attribute problems of "confusion of values" and "lack of home training," to the general dearth of cultural literacy. Because some children lack consistent interchanges with persons who are culturally literate in the broad sense and are not receiving this information in school, there needs to be a very strong effort to counterbalance this deprivation.¹⁰ This essential and basic information should be made "more readily available inside the schools."¹¹

The scarcity in "world knowledge" has permeated not only pre-kindergarten through grade twelve, but the college campus as well. Reminiscing on the educational reforms on campuses in the sixties, Bloom maintained that , "You don't replace something with nothing."¹² In his opinion, this was precisely what took place during the educational reform of the sixties. According to Bloom, American education is now suffering the consequences of those reforms: declining study of languages and in "all of human learning."¹³ He contended that if there is no prospect of the new, the criticism of the old is of no value. Such action is described as " a way of removing the impediments to vice presented by decaying virtue."¹⁴

The openness was to "doing your own thing". .
."Growth" or "individual development" was all that was to be permitted, which in America meant only that the vulgarities present in society at large would overwhelm the delicate little plant kept in the university greenhouse for those who need other kinds of nourishment.

The reforms were without content, made for the "undirected" person. They were an acquiescence in a leveling off of the peaks, and were the source of the collapse of the entire American educational structure, recognized by all parties when they talk about the need to go "back to basics." This collapse is directly traceable to both the teachings and the deeds of the universities in the sixties. More important than the bad teachers and the self-indulgent doctrines was the disappearance of the reasons for and the models of--for example "the king's English." The awareness of the highest is what points the lower upward. Now, it may be possible, with a lot of effort and political struggle, to return to earlier standards of accomplishment in the three R's, but it will not be easy to recover the knowledge of philosophy, history and literature that was trashed. . . .¹⁵

Describing the universality of cultural literacy as a goal, Hirsch explained that Thomas Jefferson and Martin Luther King, Jr. articulated the same basic concept of a dream equally based on character content and personal merit rather than race, creed, color or economic status.¹⁶

Both of these leaders understood that just having the right to vote is meaningless if a citizen is disenfranchised by illiteracy or semiliteracy. Illiterate and semiliterate Americans are condemned not only to poverty, but also to the powerlessness of incomprehension. Knowing that they do not understand the issues, and feeling prey to manipulative oversimplifications, they do not trust the system of which they are supposed to be the masters. They do not feel themselves to be active participants in our republic, and they often do not turn out to vote. The civic importance of cultural literacy lies in the fact that true enfranchisement depends upon knowledge, upon literacy, and literacy upon cultural literacy.¹⁷

A contributing factor in the education of a culturally literate person is the perception of relevance of subject matter to life in general. As N.J. observed, students demonstrate an “inability to see connection between academics and life.” There is no doubt that many students lack what is considered “basic” historical knowledge.

Neither Lincoln nor the Civil War is well known to this generation of students. Not even the strongest history students have a secure purchase on the chronological setting of the Civil war. Among the youngsters scoring in the top quarter on the history assessment, three of every ten cannot place the Civil War in the proper half-century. Yet we would contend that it is impossible to understand American history at all if one lacks any idea of when the Civil War occurred. It is not only the single most traumatic and decisive domestic event since the thirteen colonies won

their independence from Britain; it is also the anchoring event of the nineteenth century, the climactic conflict to which other major events led and from which many others resulted.¹⁸

Perhaps an acknowledgement of this problem and a sincere effort to alleviate it would be fruitful. At the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School, L.F.'s students and many others as well, expressed concern that there were "no African-American History classes." In informal settings, many of his colleagues agreed. Also as noted in the English Department assessment, two teachers suggested the use of "more culturally-based material." Relevance in history and literature should be based on a concept of "making sense" or "making meaning" out of the offered information. Antiquarian interests and mental gymnastics should not be the sole motivations in these designated canons.

B.S. lamented that some "students have given up trying rather than face possible failure." One consensus of opinion among staff members was that it was necessary to combat the "can't do" and poverty excuses by incorporating more information and materials into lessons pertaining to African-American role models of the present as well as of the past. The following account by John H. Johnson, a former welfare recipient, can be shared with students: Under the austere circumstances of his birth in 1918 and his Arkansas rearing neither hugs nor rods were spared.¹⁹ John H. Johnson admonished:

. . .Is there a message in this? Yes. The message is that we've strayed in Black America--and in White America--from the values of family, community, and hard work. And we've got to go back to that future. We've got to go back to the time when being an adult

was a dangerous vocation that required a total commitment to the community and every child in it.²⁰

Referring to millions of Black southerners who migrated from the South to Harlem, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Philadelphia and Gary as internal immigrants, John H. Johnson saw that movement as equal to the Ellis Island saga. Those Blacks, he felt, were due more attention. They had, with their hopes, fears, and flimsy cardboard suitcases

. . . changed the beat of America. They brought the blues with them and jazz and gospel music. They brought the rhythms and styles that changed Broadway and American music and culture.²¹

One of N.J.'s possible solutions to student apathy was the "use of high interest materials (sports, music, dance, movies), . . .etc." Tina Turner's autobiography might stimulate students as well as provide valuable historical facts. As she reminisced on her year of birth--1939, Tina Turner trumpeted some African-American achievements:

Ethel Waters, the star of Duke Ellington's steamy Cotton Club revues, appeared in concert at the New York World's Fair, and also became the first Black woman to star in a Broadway drama (Mamba's Daughters, it was called). It was the year that Jane Bolin became the country's first Black female judge; that more than a thousand black voters defied Ku Klux Klan cross-burnings to cast ballots in Miami; that Billie Holiday, the doomed jazz singer recorded "Strange Fruit," a blood-chilling account of a black lynching in the South. And it was the year that Marian Anderson, the noted black contralto, denied the use of the capital's Constitution Hall by its white owners, the Daughters of the American Revolution, sang instead on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial under the aegis of the Roosevelt administration, before a shivering Easter Sunday audience of seventy-five thousand cheering people.²²

Besides imparting the cited information on African-American culture, Tina expressed her sentiments on morals and values which might also be shared with students. After relating much of the unpleasantness, abuse and divorce she suffered before making phenomenal musical accomplishments, Tina averred:

. . . But the real power behind whatever success I have now was something I found within myself--something that's in all of us, I think, a little piece of God just waiting to be discovered. . . Buddhism changed my old patterns of thought, it taught me to be a positive thinker. It helps you to stop saying "What I can't do and what I don't have," and start saying, "What I am going to do."²³

Explaining how, even as a little girl, she never gave in to alcohol, drugs, or even cigarettes, Tina declared: "I gave in to myself. I went inside of me to help me. It can happen. You can do it." She summed up her basic philosophy by stating that "the whole thing is about earning your way and you don't really get there until you earn it. that's the real truth."²⁴

Certainly, any effort to convey to students the need to be introspective and self-evaluative might be instrumental in values clarification. Encouraging students to write autobiographical essays as well as read biographies and autobiographies of famous African-Americans are viable conduits to attaining such goals. In fact, a plan was implemented by the English/language arts curriculum alignment committee during the summer of 1992 to launch the long works reading unit on each grade level with a highly acclaimed literary work by or about a person of color. In keeping with that plan, Kaffir Boy by Mark Mathabane (his biography)

became the initial required reading assignment for grade twelve. Hence this use of African-American culture might be a link to general cultural literacy.

A strong accentuation of positive inner qualities of role models as well as those of the students themselves could be helpful in building self-esteem and enhancing academic motivation. Such teaching techniques not only offer inspiration to African-American students but also aid in combatting racism.

A black educator, a specialist in instructional materials, insists that, in spite of all other factors, an imaginative approach to learning could keep the spark alive in black children. Since the cost of such materials and training is modest, he said, to deny the children the aids is to deny them the union card of a high school or college education, without which employment these days is a sometime thing.²⁵

Like any other American institution, the public school is victimized by racism.

. . . Many educators believe that negative stereotypes of Black men--as lazy, violent troublemakers--are locked into the psyche of the educational system, and that these images influence teachers when they teach Black boys and explain why these children fail in school.²⁶

David J. Dent quoted Dr. Bruce R. Hare, educational psychologist and associate professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, who said:

Teachers and principals are likely to bring stereotypes of Black boys to work with them: "A conscious conspiracy to destroy Black males isn't necessary for destruction to occur. Discrimination merely requires that school personnel act according to the existing stereotypes they have; this negative

treatment of children tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.”²⁷

Dent said:

According to the U.S. Department of Education, nearly 20 percent of all African-American males drop out of high school; in many cities the percentage is nearly 50 percent. Black boys also score lower than any other group of youngsters on standardized tests. They are disproportionately misclassified and placed in classes for the mentally retarded or are tracked into slow-learning classes more often and with more dire consequences than for any group of children. And they are suspended, expelled and corporally punished more often and for lesser offenses than are white youngsters. They are also less likely to go to college than Black girls, and when they do, they're more likely to drop out.²⁸

Dent enumerated some of the pitfalls to which young Black men are vulnerable; one out of twenty-one are murdered, their unemployment rates are double those of all other social groups, and they have “the extraordinary chance of being incarcerated.”²⁹ All of these problems, Dent maintained, begin in the classroom.³⁰ If there is any truth to the latter statement, educators should exhaust every possible means to thwart these pitfalls. In initiating such efforts, there is nothing to lose, but a lot can be gained.

In the open forum type section called “Speak Out,” this question is raised: “Should we create separate classrooms for black males?”³¹ Answering “yes,” Jawanza Kunjufu, author of Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys noted that there is “a disproportionate number of African-American boys in special

education classes (85 percent), suspended or placed in slower reading groups. ³²

Black males constitute "37 percent of school suspensions and only 4 percent of gifted and talented students." ³³

Although Kunjufu felt that ideally, African-American males should be kept in a "heterogeneous classroom with more African-American male teachers, higher teacher expectations, more holistic lesson plans, and a more relevant curriculum such as . . . [his] SETCLAE program (Self-Esteem Through Culture Leads to Academic Excellence," he observed that "most schools have not responded fast enough to this emergency and black males remain on the endangered species list." Kunjufu proposed cooperative learning rather than the division of students by ability. On the other hand, he maintained that

the fundamental problem is not the design of the classroom but the atmosphere in the classroom. Most teachers do not see African-American children (especially males) as their children--there's simply nothing at stake. If only teachers lived on the same block with these students, or if these students were considered by teachers to be potential sons-in law.

Such is not the case today. Instead, America is willing to build rooms almost exclusively for Black males, and they're called prisons. ³⁴

Answering "no" to the question of creating separate classrooms for Black males, John McAdoo, co-editor of Black Children: Social, Educational and Parental Environments (Sage Inc.), contended that

African-American males will learn in any environment that positively supports their learning needs. African-American males learn best in a firm, structured environment, where the learning, behavior expectations and goals are clearly contracted with them and their parents. ³⁵

Advocating the development of positive relationships between males and females, with a focus on shared responsibility and mutual respect, McAdoo stated that an optimal learning environment is one in which the black male's "community is respected and valued within his classroom and school. He needs to see more African-American male teachers actively involved at all levels in the public schools."³⁶

McAdoo maintained that the teachers should hold positive expectations for males to work up to their abilities and that the teaching assignments should reflect an understanding of diversity in the students' learning needs. The teachers and principal should provide a co-educational environment that fosters positive acceptance of African-American culture through the use of culturally sensitive texts and classroom assignments. In addition to this, McAdoo suggested that teachers use the parents of African-American male and or "African-American volunteers in the classroom."³⁷

Unfortunately, according to Kunjufu, many people have a lack of faith. This lack of faith is predicated upon the prejudice and assumption that Black people cannot think for nor can they take care of themselves.³⁸ While R.V.'s observation about parental responsibility is valid, teachers are equally culpable.

. . . . The current dilemma is that many parents have not taken the responsibility to be the primary educator, and many teachers do not believe Black children can learn. The burning desire to develop Black children has eroded from the home and one-room school shack. The dilemma in white citadels of political power is not the stated question of "Why can't Johnny learn?" but a more diabolical concept of "Should Johnny learn?"³⁹

To “insure sound theoretical direction,” Kunjufu contended that researching and disseminating ideas was vital. This dissemination of ideas was best accomplished in the form of parent workshops, staff in-service training, and students’ assembly programs. Having provided workshops for parents, teachers, and students since 1975, he has presented a cogent argument “that effective schools avoid stagnation with a constant flow of information to all parties.”⁴⁰ Kunjufu explained but opposed the 1966 and 1969 reports issued by Lensen and Coleman which attributed the low achievement by poor children mainly to inherent disabilities characterized by poverty. Applauding Weber’s refutation of those Colemann/Lensen reports, Kunjufu espoused the additional findings by Edmonds, Madden and Brookover which “confirm and support” the contention that teacher expectations outweigh socioeconomic factors in student performance.⁴¹

Acknowledging that some schools are more effective than others, Kunjufu, however, identified and named Ronald Edmonds’ list of seven basic principles inherent in instructionally effective schools:

1. **A sense of Mission**
2. **Leadership**
3. **High Expectations for All Students and Staff**
4. **Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress**
5. **A Positive Learning Climate**
6. **Sufficient Opportunity for Learning**
7. **Parent/Community Involvement**⁴²

Recapitulating Goodlad’s denunciation of the tracking system which “gives up” on the problems experienced by students in low tracks, Kunjufu acknowledged

the complexity of the situation but offered three suggestions as well. Regardless of tracking, all students deserve:

1. consistent teacher expectations
2. Collective peer support and mutual student cooperation, and
3. enrichment programs according to student need.⁴³

N.J. has complained that students exhibit an “unwillingness to work and study. . . lack of motivation” and R.V. has lamented that “our students have allowed the classroom to become a limiter for their learning.” In informal discussions and conversations, most teachers agreed that the students do not make wise use of their time.

A possible way to set an example of wise use of time is for the teacher to turn as many situations as are feasible into learning experiences. For instance, students spend a lot of classroom time and leisure time “snapping on” and “dissing” each other. In dealing with the students’ tendencies to “snap” on each other, a teacher might utilize such incidents as opportunities to inform students of the cultural origin and significance of “snapping.” Some aspects of this skill are presented and described as “signifying” or “playing the dozens” in The Signifying Monkey by Henry Louis Gates Jr.⁴⁴ For years, this researcher has found that “snapping” habit to be very annoying and completely incomprehensible. She was, therefore, quite surprised and enlightened (for she had never even heard of “playing the dozens”) upon learning of its origins as depicted in some of the works of Zora Neale Hurston.

In fact, Gates, in the afterword to Their Eyes Were Watching God, seemed to applaud the recent renewed interest in Zora Neale Hurston: “. . . More people have read Hurston’s works since 1975 than did between that date and the publication of her first novel in 1934.”⁴⁵ Hurston’s literary influence on Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and the “resurgence of popular and academic readerships” . . . signify her multiple canonization in the black, the American, and the feminist traditions.”

Actually, Gates saw Hurston’s great achievement in her “usage of a divided voice, a double-voice unreconciled, . . . a verbal analogue of her double experiences as a woman in a male-dominated world and as a black person in a nonblack world.”⁴⁶

Indeed, plans were formulated to include the above mentioned authors in the updated curriculum for the high school.

On many occasions in departmental and faculty meetings, and even in regular conversations, R. V. has expressed her disgust with students who wish to be entertained and with administrators who encourage teachers to do more to motivate students to learn. She and many other faculty members believe that students do not spend enough time at home on school work. They feel that young people spend too much time watching television.

“As powerful as the TV media has become, they have, as yet, been unable to force us to turn it on!” said Kunjufu.⁴⁷ Commenting on the frequent exclamation of boredom on the part of modern youth, he explained that young people who say they are bored and that there is nothing to do, mean “that there is nothing to watch, and they don’t know how to do anything.” Kunjufu defined boredom as the result of

having nothing on the inside. "In African culture the word is 'innerattainment' versus . . . [the] Euro-American . . . word . . . 'entertainment'."⁴⁸ Because young people need to participate in learning, Kunjufu maintained that television is detrimental in that it makes our young people into "passive spectators." Instead, young people should be engaged in meaningful activity.

After having taught Asian students and having observed their general demeanor, R.V. who has been also a mentor to a few of them, has on a few occasions, shared her favorable impressions of them. Another observation on this subject is note-worthy. In a recent interview, Dr. Harold W. Stevenson of the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences, Palo Alto, California stated:

Contrary to popular opinion, Asians are not any smarter than Americans. Although most people think that Asians score higher on IQ tests, a study of the actual results proved that they are no more intelligent than Americans.

Nor is television the answer. For instance, Japanese students spend even more time in front of the set than do Americans.

No, Asians do better in school simply because they try harder . . . and success results from hard work just as much as from intelligence. And this applies to people who have emigrated to the US from Asia as well.⁵⁰

Acknowledging the difficulty in changing the fundamental attitudes of American people, Harold Stevenson encouraged Americans to learn from this listing of the aspects of successful educational lifestyles of Asians:

What Asian kids have that American kids don't:

- * A positive attitude about achievement . . .
- * Students of varied abilities in the same class . . .
- * Better-prepared teachers. . .

- * Interested parents . . .
- * A place to study . . .
- * More homework . . .
- * Superior note-taking skills . . .
- * A different approach to television . . .
- * Positive role models . . .
- * Better practice workbooks . . .
- * Relaxed schools . . .⁵¹

According to the United States Census Bureau, two out of five Asian-Americans “have completed at least four years of college.”⁵² That rate is double the rate for Whites and four times the amount for Blacks. Katsumi Kunitsugu who is the executive secretary for the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center in Los Angeles, explained that motivation and drive among young Asian-Americans to get an education comes from the home, where the importance of an education is emphasized.⁵³ Perhaps this information can be shared and encouragement to parents can be provided through the high school P.T.A.

L.F. advocated increased “in-class” assistance for teachers who are having problems in motivating students. Much of Seymour Sarason’s advice and principles would certainly be helpful in any staff development program. In his advice to teachers on the “prepotent responses to misbehavior,” Sarason, in his interviews with hundreds of teachers asked them how many times they had communicated with the parents in a given month for good reasons as opposed to reactions to misbehavior. The result of this survey was that not more than one percent “indicated that they had initiated such a contact.”⁵⁴ It is therefore advisable for teachers to maintain home contact, making positive reports as well as negative.

In an effort to foster greater parent-teacher-student bonding, the P.T.A. might sponsor a workshop designed to strengthen parenting skills. Kegan posed a thought-provoking question as well as very sound advice in dealing with problematic young people.

Is our response essentially to the anxiety or to the person who is feeling anxious? This is a subtle but critical distinction. The usual caring response to negative feelings is an attempt to relieve the feelings.⁵⁵

The adult in the situation--parent or teacher--must make the distinction and try to have a firm control of his or her own emotions:

The ability to remain present for another when he is anxious, to recognize and accept his anxiety, without ourselves becoming too anxious or immediately trying to relieve the anxiety, has long been understood to be a feature of competent professional psychological help.⁵⁶

In fact, both parents and teachers can be reminded of the importance of stability.

It takes a special wisdom for the family of an adolescent to understand that by remaining in place so that the adolescent can have the family there to ignore and reject, the family is providing something very important, and is still, in a new way, intimately and importantly involved in the child's development.⁵⁷

Often, one encounters difficulty in attempting to offer advice to adults, especially if their ages and experiences indicate that they should be the advisors, or if they erect barriers to the process of change. What was good about the assessment presented in this chapter was that the teachers, for the most part, were honest and open.

Sarason emphasized that when efforts at educational change founder repeatedly, in spite of the staff's good intentions,

. . . it is safe to assume that we are prisoners of ways of thinking that seem so right, natural, and proper that we never critically examine them or, if we do, we fear talking about them in public.⁵⁸

Admittedly, there have been many efforts at change that have foundered. In fact, there were positive changes made that have since been reversed. Not wanting to buck the system, individual staff members often fall victim to apathy. Frequently, "the system" is sometimes unwittingly conceived in a way that clouds or obscures the available range of possibilities. Too often, this conception of the system leads to rigidity or inaction, or serves as a convenient target for blame for almost anything that goes wrong.⁵⁹ In essence..

. . . the modal urban school system does not have the soil in which the seeds for new ideas can grow and thrive easily or well. To argue otherwise requires a capacity to deny reality that goes well beyond ordinary psychopathology.⁶⁰

Teachers might be encouraged and inspired by the suggestion that viable changes can be implemented despite adverse administrative procedures and some students' undesirable home environments.

An effective staff development program should forcefully and emphatically impress upon the staff that they can exert a positive and educationally effective impression on the students regardless of outside influences. With single-mindedness,

perseverance and unwavering dedication to helping each student attain his or her greatest capacity of learning, a marked improvement is certainly possible and probable.

Sarason told the story of a Jewish teacher who had taught in a particular school for forty years and was four years away from retirement. In the previous decade, the school demographics had changed drastically from a primarily Jewish and Italian student body to an almost exclusively Puerto-Rican and Black one. This teacher unwittingly taught Sarason a great deal about staff development.⁶¹

Upon visiting her classroom, Sarason had expected boredom and rigidity because of her somewhat aloof and reserved manner. On the contrary, in the ensuing months, he found just the reverse. She was creative, innovative and enthusiastic. To his amazement and puzzlement, what he found was that

. . . at the end of each year, the academic achievement of her second-graders was, on the average, above national norms, and in the four years we were in that school no child in her class was ever referred by her as a behavior problem. My puzzlement was simply that I did not understand what kept her going in this remarkable fashion. The more I thought about it the more I began to understand that despite her perception of how the school, the school system, and the neighborhood changed, she could not or would not change her way of conducting herself as a teacher. It is almost as if she said to herself: "I do not care how much things have changed, or what other people do about these changes. I can (must?) only continue to function in a certain way and if I do I'll achieve my goals. I can make these children learn." She had to feel that she was the primary determiner of her behavior in her role and that she was not going to be unduly influenced by external factors, forces, or changes.⁶²

Certainly, the above anecdote illustrates the dogged determination and dedication of a teacher who, as N. J. suggested in her "solutions," strives "to meet kids at their points of need"

Sarason pointed out that every immigrant group throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had been disparaged and considered a threat to the existing populace. Controlling groups, social classes and school personnel perceived the immigrants as intellectually and culturally inferior. The word "immigrant" according to Sarason was in reference both to the influx of people and large scale transitional movements from one section of the country to another. Existing groups perceived these people as needing a "new but familiar shape and substance."⁶³

For most teachers to remain or become creative, innovative, enthusiastic, and dedicated with high expectations for students, they need to feel that what they do matters, and that their ideas and suggestions for educational policy are important. What Sarason thought that needed special emphasis was the difficulty experienced by many teachers in verbalizing their discontent with having little or no input regarding decisions affecting their work.⁶⁴ This "difficulty in recognizing and verbalizing resentment reflects the degree to which teachers are accustomed to being treated as lowly proletariats."⁶⁵ Under such adverse conditions, many veteran teachers experience "burnout."

According to Sarason:

The word burnout has become quite fashionable these days, although it is obvious that different people mean different things by it. Without doubt the best discussion is that by Cherniss (1980) in his book, Professional Burnout in Human Service Organizations. That book

describes and analyzes what happens to people when they become professionals.⁶⁶

Citing Cherniss' description of burnout, Sarason maintained:

Burnout involves a change in attitude and behavior in response to a demanding, frustrating, unrewarding work experience. The dictionary defines "to burn out" as "to fail, wear out, or become exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength or resources." This term all too aptly describes the experience of many human service professionals. However, the term "burnout" has come to have an additional meaning in recent research and writing on the topic; it refers to negative changes in work-related attitudes and behavior in response to job stress. What are these negative changes? A major one is loss of concern for the client and a tendency to treat clients in a detached, mechanical fashion. Other changes include increasing discouragement, pessimism, and fatalism about one's work; decline in motivation, effort, and involvement in work; apathy, negativism; frequent irritability and anger with clients and colleagues; preoccupation with one's own comfort and welfare on the job; a tendency to rationalize failure by blaming the clients or "the system"; and resistance to change, growing rigidity, and loss of creativity.⁶⁷

Perhaps a distribution in faculty and departmental meetings of copies of the above description of the symptoms of "burnout" can serve as a deterrent to the creation of circumstances conducive to such pitfalls.

For change to be implemented and effected, it is mandatory that teachers agree to a proposed innovation, participate, adopt, adapt and modify basic premises in the school's culture.⁶⁸ Reformers and innovators must voluntarily relinquish past plans and improvements to reformulate new ways to respond to the demands and needs of

everyone involved--students, parents, and the community.⁶⁹ Once improvements become embedded in behaviors and ordinary goals of a school's staff, they can be sustained.⁷⁰

. . . A group may set out to reduce academic failures and end up addressing social and self-esteem concerns for early adolescents. In a way, the difficulty of establishing accountability in an organization characterized by multiple goals and approaches makes it more important for leaders to assess and evaluate what happened and for whom. By describing contexts, needs, processes, and interactions, leaders come to understand the meaning of school improvement for participants. Thus project assessments and evaluations are not a report card that records whether one passed or failed at school improvement, but an individualized record that indicates what outcomes one has achieved and how.⁷¹

In the effort to initiate progressive and positive change, facilitators can use anecdotes with motivational messages that teachers can share with their students, such as the one that follows. After many instance of being ridiculed by his classmates, Johnson retaliated by plunging deeper into his studies and reading self-help books. The basic messages or themes of these books by Dale Carnegie and other authors--faith, a positive mental attitude, self-confidence--changed his life. In addition to their up-beat theme,

most of these books listed one-two-three practical steps for improving personal effectiveness. One step was to practice conversation and selling approaches in private before trying them out in public.⁷²

From this experience, Johnson learned that one of the greatest emotions in the world is watching disdain transformed into awe and admiration.⁷³ The unforgettable

lesson he learned is: "There is no defense against an excellence that speaks to a real need."⁷⁴ Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Johnson continued to read and reread self-help books. His favorites were Think and Grow Rich by Napoleon Hill and Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People. In addition to the books on self-improvement, selling, and success, he also read "great classics of Black history and literature, including Booker T. Washington's autobiography, Up From Slavery, W.E.B. DuBois's essays and the poetry of Langston Hughes."⁷⁵

Perhaps the most important lesson Johnson learned from these books was "other-focusing." He perceived that: "We live, all of us, too close to ourselves. And all of us need to focus more on what others want rather than on what we want."⁷⁶ Johnson stated that, generally people act to advance or preserve their own interests. He recommended that a person who wants to satisfy a need that is vital to his or her self-interest, should study other people and determine what they want.

Johnson's advice was and is:

You can't be indifferent to them. Nor can you challenge everything they say and do. Not if you want them to help you. If that's your goal--and half the battle is winning friends and influencing people in defining your goal and the other people's goal--you've got to study people and make it their self-interest to advance your self-interest.⁷⁷

Although Johnson related the shame suffered by him and his family when their economic circumstances forced them to accept "relief" or welfare, he did not hesitate to recommend welfare for those who need it. Referring to the criticism leveled at the present welfare system, Johnson pinpointed what he saw as the main problem--"the

purpose of welfare and the organization of the welfare system. the goal must always be to get off welfare”⁷⁸

Johnson maintained that “the government must play a role as the employer of last resort, when all else fails.” He and his father had been able to secure employment with the WPA (Works Progress Administration) and NYA (National Youth Administration under the leadership of Mary McCleod Bethune, thereby obviating their need for further public assistance. Although they had moved from the government jobs to better jobs and better times, the WPA-NYA ladder had been “a necessary first step” that enabled them to maintain their dignity and hope “until the private economy could provide alternatives.”⁷⁹

Touting himself as the only former welfare recipient in his tax bracket, Johnson felt that he had earned the right to draw an analogy between his experience and the economic crisis of the 1980s:

When you look at the armies of misdirected youths roaming urban streets, it becomes obvious that we could create taxpayers and perhaps millionaires by organizing modern equivalents of the alphabets of the thirties-- the WPA and NYA projects and CCC camps--that saved the American economic system. We need to think deeply about this opportunity. For, as John F. Kennedy said, “If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.”⁸⁰

Like many Blacks and Whites, Johnson had assumed that all Black entrepreneurs had been relegated to inferior status, playing inconspicuous roles in American commerce. Imagine his surprise when he discovered that from the inception on America, Blacks had “sold goods and services to both Black and White consumers”

and "had operated in the mainstream of money" and commerce. According to his newfound facts, "Blacks hit the ground running and were soon among the major entrepreneurs of the new country. By the time of the American Revolution, scores of prominent Black business people abounded."⁸¹

Young Black prospective entrepreneurs might be interested in knowing the following facts: Samuel Fraunces was the owner of New York's Fraunces' Tavern, "the favorite watering hole of George Washington" and James Forten "employed forty workers, Black and White, in his Philadelphia sail factory." Later, the nineteenth century ushered in Blacks who held prominent status "in the fashion and clothing fields, the coal and lumber industry, and wholesale and retail trade.

They operated foundries, tanneries, and factories. They made rope, shoes, cigars, furniture, and machinery. They operated major inns and hotels in southern and northern cities and were in some cities the Hyatts and the Hiltons of their day. In addition to all this they held virtual monopolies in the catering, barbering and hairdressing fields.⁸²

It was later with the overthrow of Reconstruction and the beginning of Jim Crow laws that Black entrepreneurs became restricted. Zoning restrictions were forced on them and acts of violence were perpetrated against the Black consumer market and the great Black commercial streets, such as Auburn Avenue in Atlanta, Beale Street in Memphis and South Parkway in Chicago.⁸³

Recommended Principles for Successful Academic and Entrepreneurial Pursuits

As an astute businessman and entrepreneur, Johnson espoused the following principles which might be helpful to students and teachers as well in their academic and entrepreneurial pursuits:

1. Ration your time, eliminating as much interference as possible.
2. Focus your activities, excluding much of what is irrelevant.
3. Learn how to size up a situation and determine whether or not it advances your interests.
4. Computerize your mind and your memory, storing up information about past failures and successes.
5. Constantly review and renew your commitments, never taking anything for granted.
6. Delegate "freely and check on the task everyday."
7. Remember "that history, money, and all the forces of the universe are on the side of the man or woman who sets a goal and works night and day to achieve it."⁸⁴
8. Ask and listen. People, "Black and White, will tell you everything you need to know if you confess your ignorance and approach them in the right spirit."⁸⁵

9. "Never burn your bridges behind you . . . Leave every job and situation so that you can come back."⁸⁶
10. Think "and dream of success in small steps." Everytime you make a step and "every time you accomplish a small goal, it gives you confidence to go on from there."⁸⁷
11. Be adaptable to change.

It is advisable to incorporate much if not all of Johnson's principles into strategies for change in any school situation and certainly in the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School. Granted, opposers could contend that the above precepts are business-oriented. Well, many teachers see education as a business and believe it should be handled as such.

That's the only way to run a business in the modern world. You can't be satisfied with yesterday's success, no matter how enjoyable or satisfying it might be. And you're a fool if you think that what you did yesterday is going to satisfy your customers or your board or you wife forever.⁸⁸

12. The best way to deal with a mistake is to admit your error.
"Don't waffle. Don't make excuses. Don't explain. Open your mouth, say you're sorry--and move it."⁸⁹
13. Try to maintain a "PMA--Positive Mental Attitude."⁹⁰
14. Force yourself to use your hidden or inner strengths.⁹¹

15. Be sincere for sincerity "is perhaps the greatest selling force in the world."⁹²
16. Like virtue, quality is its own reward.⁹³
17. Be persistent in pursuing your goals and refuse to give up.⁹⁴
18. Find the vulnerable point and push the yes button by grabbing "the client's attention in the first two or three seconds with a fact or an emotional statement that hits him where he lives or does business."⁹⁵
19. Find a common ground, no matter how narrow, that binds the entrepreneur and the customer together. Emphasize the values, hopes and aspirations that are binding.⁹⁶

Acknowledging and apparently advocating a pluralistic society which epitomizes the philosophy of the multicultural curriculum which the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School has implemented, Johnson mused:

. . . Black, Brown and White Americans are chained together by tradition, history, and a common market and . . . what helps one group of Americans helps all Americans.
And if . . . life has meaning and color and truth, it is because millions of Americans, Black and White, have proved . . . that the Dream is still alive and well and working in America.⁹⁷

Teacher Collaboration and Student Peer Cooperation

In order to inculcate and perpetuate those ideals and values in young people, teachers can collaborate on various projects and tasks. This was done by English and

language arts teachers as they co-planned and co-taught. Such collaboration and cooperation are beneficial to teachers and students alike.

On the general subject of peer affiliations, Kunjufu shared information on "negative peer pressure" and described it as a "silent killer." The methods of counteracting the effects of this academically unproductive peer pressure, according to Kunjufu, are to eliminate tracking from the classroom and to encourage cooperative learning among young people.⁹⁸

. . . Cooperation is one of the most important human activities. People who can organize as a group to accomplish a common end are likely to be successful in business, sports, the military, or in virtually any endeavor. In fact, one of the few areas of human activity in which cooperation is not a primary focus is in the schools.⁹⁹

Sarason found that some teachers* used certain classroom arrangements to ensure control of the class. There was an explicit assumption that one kind of student can influence another kind of students. Sarason's point was that since interrelationships within the class are presumably important, the teacher should utilize this premise by organizing the group in a manner that benefits from peer influence--playing a role in relation to the problems and issues that confront the class or group. Making his point blatantly clear, Sarason was by no means suggesting that students should run a classroom, but that the social nature of learning be utilized.¹⁰⁰

Summary

Perhaps the malady of low test scores, little or no motivation and general low morale can be alleviated by continuing to employ the methods and procedures cited (in dark print) in this chapter. It is conceivable that the resource pool--literally and figuratively--might be a means to attaining that goal by using African-American literature as a catalyst or link to achieving general cultural literacy or "world knowledge."

Much of the flurry of activity evident in an attempt to recruit speakers and workshops for staff development is reminiscent of "Acres of Diamonds", an essay by Russell Conwell and the short story, "Lamb to the Slaughter" by Ronald Dahl. The solution to the problem might just lie within the walls of the school. Without appearing smug or presumptuous, the researcher would proffer this succinct advice: Do not attempt to reinvent the wheel, but consistently use all available resources within the school (literally and figuratively).

To summarize, the methods and procedures presented for change and school improvement from the perspective of the English/language arts department were those offered by four teachers: L. F., N. J., B. S., and R. V. Also presented were strategies espoused by Kunjufu (his own as well as those of Weber, Brookover, Edmonds, and Goodlad), Stevenson, Sarason, and Johnson. These literary references with autobiographical anecdotes by Tina Turner and John Johnson, of course, reflect and express the researcher's sentiments and views on procedures for school improvement.

Notes

¹ M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled: A new Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 226.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., pp. 226 & 227.

⁶Jawanza Kunjufu, Developing Positive Images and Discipline in Black Children (Chicago: African American Images, 1984), p. 43.

⁷Ibid., pp. 43-45.

⁸Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., What Do Our 17-Year Olds Know? Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 20 & 21.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰E.D. Hirsch, Jr. Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to know (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1987), p.24.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Allen Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p.320.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 320 & 321.

¹⁶Hirsch, pp. 11& 12.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ravitch & Finn, pp. 49 & 50.

¹⁹Johnson H. Johnson, Succeeding Against the Odds: The Inspiring Autobiography of One of America's Wealthiest Entrepreneurs (New York: Warner Books, 1989), p. 38.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., pp. 57 & 58.

²²Tina Turner with Kurt Loder, I, Tina: My Life Story (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1986), p.12.

²³Ibid., pp. 223 & 224.

²⁴Ibid., p.224.

²⁵William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, Black Rage (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 136.

²⁶David J. Dent, "Readin, ' Ritin' & Rage: How Schools are Destroying Black Boys," Essence, November 1989, p. 54.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 54 & 55.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹American Teacher: Democracy in Education/Education for Democracy - Official Publication/ American Federation of Teachers/AFL-CIO, April 1990, Volume 74, No. 7, p. 6.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Jawanza Kunjufu, p. 85.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 87.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 87 & 88.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 92 & 93

⁴⁴Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Signifying Monkey: A theory of African-American Literary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 99-101.

⁴⁵Zora Neale Hurston, Their Eyes Were Watching God (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1990), p. 190.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Kunjufu, p. 75.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 76.

⁵⁰Harold W. Stevenson, "Lessons in Learning For All of Us From Asian Students," Bottom Line II, Number 16, August 30, 1990, p. 13.

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 13 & 14.

⁵²Newsday, September 18, 1991.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Seymour B. Sarason, The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change, Ended. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1982), p. 231.

⁵⁵Robert Kegan, The Evolving Self (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 125.

⁵⁶Ibid., p.126.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 129.

⁵⁸Sarason, p. 88.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 164.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 171.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., p. 172.

⁶³Ibid., p. 173.

⁶⁴Ibid., p.186.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 194.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 203.

⁶⁸Byrd L. Jones and Robert W. Maloy, Partnerships for Improving Schools (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1988), p. 34.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 140.

⁷²Johnson, p.67.

⁷³Ibid., p.68.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., p.69.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 68.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., p.75.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 88.

⁸²Ibid., pp. 88 & 89.

⁸³Ibid., p. 89.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 94 & 95.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 134.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 139.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 140.

⁸⁸Ibid., pp. 154 & 155.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 167.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 175.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid., p. 176.

⁹³Ibid., p. 222.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 225.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 227.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 228.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 356.

⁹⁸Jawanza Kunjufu, To Be Popular or Smart: The Black Peer Group (Chicago: African-American Images, 1988), pp. vii & 77.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Sarason, pp. 229 & 230.

CHAPTER 4

THE RESULTS OF FORMATIVE EVALUATIONS AND THE IMPACT OF THE WORKSHOPS

Introduction

In the recent past, many American high school graduates have been deprived of the cultural vocabulary that was the common possession of educated persons in generations past.¹

. . . Some repair work is necessary for them and for the members of the current school generation. They must be reintroduced to the cultural vocabulary that continues to be the foundation for literate national communication.²

This national paucity in cultural literacy or "world knowledge" has not left the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School unscathed. In an effort to initiate some "repair work," for this malady, five workshops were conducted for teachers in the English/language arts department.

With the purpose of building teacher morale, exposing teachers to some unique teaching materials, enhancing the spirit of collaboration and cooperation, and ultimately improving student academics, the following workshops were presented:

- 1) "Where There's A Will, There's An 'A' "
- 2) Cultural Literacy and Its Validity
- 3) Using Educational Tools of African-American Culture As a

Possible Link to Cultural Literacy

- 4) **Using One Mode of African-American Culture As a Link to General Cultural Literacy: The Rap**
- 5) **Developing the English Department Resource Area**

This chapter comprises excerpts from dialogue and conversations from each workshop, individual workshop assessment forms and evaluations, and relevant literary information. Again, for the sake of anonymity, teachers are referred to by their initials.

Workshop # 1: "Where There's A Will, There's An 'A' "

The first workshop, entitled "Where There's A Will, There's An 'A'," convened on January 23, 1991. Motivational in nature, it was presented with the intention of helping to inspire teachers to apply some of the techniques offered by Claude Olney as teaching tools. The hope was that the end result would be an increase in motivation among the Roosevelt students, possibly resulting in increased scores on teacher-made tests as well as standardized exams.

After the administrative supervisor of the English department conducted a brief meeting, she introduced the presenter (this researcher), who then made a statement about the purpose of the presentation and the perceived educational value of the video tapes which were about to be shown. Most people remained to view and discuss the presentation. As a prelude to "Where There's A Will, There's An 'A'," the researcher related the alleged effectiveness of the video tapes--espoused by students who gradually raised their academic levels. She also stated that parents and teachers have also attested to the positive results of the tapes.

After the presentation, L.F. (an English teacher) suggested establishing a control group to monitor the students before adopting the tapes as a part of the educational or motivational strategies for the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School's student body. In fact, he suggested that the producers be contacted and told of Roosevelt's intention of monitoring thirty or more students before adopting the video presentations as part of the educational program.

B. M. (a reading teacher) agreed with L. F. but added that the man who presented the seminar was not appealing. The audience shown (overwhelmingly White) would not appeal to Roosevelt students. L. interjected that he (Claude Olney) needed to change the color of his tone and his audience. He again suggested that students' behavior be monitored for a semester before attempting "to sell administrators or anybody on its merits."

Additionally, B. M. also stated that the students with whom she works (in remedial sessions) would not be amicable to Claude Olney's suggestion of studying two or three hours per night and said "no tape will take the place of a teacher sitting with students on an individual basis and having a meeting of the minds."

R. V. (an English teacher) had already purchased the video tapes and used them with her grandson at home, attesting to their effectiveness.

At the conclusion of the workshop, teachers were asked to complete the following assessment form:

English Departmental Meeting - January 23, 1991

Workshop #1

Topic: "Where There's A Will, There's An 'A' "

Presenter: Velma Reddick via Professor Claude Olney

Your name _____

1. From what you have seen of the video, "Where There's A Will, There's An 'A'," how do you rate it?

_____ boring
_____ interesting
_____ very interesting
_____ I have no opinion.

2. Do you feel that this film can help our students here at the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School?

_____ Yes
_____ No
_____ I don't know.

3. Should we, as a department, make the effort to utilize this material to promote academic achievement?

_____ Yes
_____ No

_____ I don't know.

4. Please give reasons for your answer. Feel free to elaborate.
5. What kinds of workshops do you think we (The English Department) should have to boost our morale and/or help us increase student motivation? (Please feel free to express yourself in an honest and uninhibited manner.)

Eight teachers returned the assessment forms, and the results follow with the total given for each category of each question. Wherever applicable, quoted responses of teachers are also given.

1. boring	1
interesting	1
very interesting	4
I have no opinion	0
2. Yes	4
No	1
3. I don't know.	3
Yes	4
No	1
I don't know.	1
4. (Specific, opinionated expression)	
5. (Again, specific, opinionated expression)	

Some teachers offered the following enhanced responses. An anonymous teacher replied to question # 2: "I don't know enough information about the

technique.” For question # 5, that same person suggested: “School based management.” to question # 2, R. V. replied “For some yes, for others not at all.” Her “I don’t know” answer to # 3 was elucidated: “ Have used the tape--as you know. I was quite enthusiastic about the idea. I’m not sure that this is the right climate to implement such an effort. (This should have been placed on # 4, second sheet.) To # 4, she said: “My reason for saying this is that those who are motivated will remain so. They either know this already and utilize the techniques.” Her response to # 5 was: “To tell the truth, I really don’t have an answer.”

In reference to # 4, B. M. had these comments: “It’s a fair film but I am not sure if our students will identify with the narrator and the members of the audience. the study techniques are not innovative. They are not of value to the remedial students with whom I work.” Her answer to # 5 was: “The reading department should meet alone and share materials.”

L. F. responded in this manner to questions # 2, 3, and 4 respectively: “Yes only if we can acquire material on conditional basis, pending results of ‘tests’ . . . * Spoke concerning establishment of ‘study group’ and ‘control group’ to monitor results.”

In response to question # 1, J. W., a social studies teacher, stated: “My interests in innovative and creative techniques make me very inquisitive concerning this material. To question #2, her answer was “Yes, but with a selected and a controlled group of students. She answered # 3 by saying “Yes, I would recommend

it for my lower functioning students who are motivated to learn. After question # 5, she listed "Behavior management, classroom management, stress, and self-esteem."

Reading teacher, R. A. said: "Introduction was too long." in reply to # 1. To # 2, she wavered: "I don't know because I did not see the entire film." Her response to # 4 was: "Just from scanning the booklet, I felt that most of the teachers here do use techniques geared to stimulate learning and raise grades. I always try to think of clues to help remember vocabulary words and spelling. For example, the word "grammar" has two a's in it and I tell the students to remember my name, Mrs. A, and use only that letter. Elementary, but it usually works. In reply to # 5, she suggested "1. New materials and 2. Audio-visual aids."

Besides simply checking off her responses, N. J. in uncharacteristic manner, tersely responded to # 3 by saying "Yes, in a modified form."

As previously stated, there is a great concern among teachers for improved student achievement and increased standardized test scores. On this subject, Kunjufu made an interesting point when he related the average response by young Black males when they are asked to name five Black entertainers. Normally, this can be done with no problem; however, when they are asked to name five Black males with college degrees, they have great difficulty. Citing the difference in SAT scores among Asian-American, European-American and African-American students, Kunjufu contended that this disparity exists not because of ability but because of study time.

The average Asian American youth studies twelve hours a week: the average White student studies eight hours a week and our youth only study five hours a week and watch more TV than anybody else in America.³

According to Kunjufu, a school should be measured mainly by teacher expectation which he believes to be "the most important factor impacting academic achievement."⁴ To the question posed as to how to raise teachers' expectation of Black student achievement, Kunjufu replied that the question is a difficult one because "it relates more to attitude than to information."⁵

He said:

I sincerely believe that you have to love your students, you have to respect them and you have to understand their culture. There are many teachers, though, who do not love, respect, or understand African American culture; last but not least, they are afraid of our boys.⁶

While Professor Claude Olney's techniques are interesting and possibly commendable, it might be concluded that those techniques are workable with certain adjustments, consideration, and suggestions proffered by the workshop participants and those principles touted by Jawanza Kunjufu.

Workshop #2: Cultural Literacy and Its Validity

The second workshop, entitled **Cultural Literacy and Its Validity** took place on February 28, 1991. The presenter (this researcher) introduced the topic by giving a recapitulation of the general dearth in cultural literacy among the present generation--both nationally and locally.

This workshop comprised three aspects: an oral presentation about the need for cultural literacy or "world knowledge," a copy of the "Individual Assessment of a

Portion of Literary 'World Knowledge'" (part of the nationwide literary assessment given by Ravitch and Finn to seventeen year-old students), and the assessment of the workshop itself.

Throughout this session, the presenter made frequent reference to the following notes on the subject with specific mention to the corroborating authors: Diane Ravitch, Chester Finn, Allan Bloom, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

In both sections of the national assessment, Black students tended to perform above average on some of the questions that dealt with authors or events of special relevance to the Black experience in America.⁷ A possible conclusion from those test results might be that Blacks will do better overall if they are taught more Black history.⁸ This is a valid point but Ravitch and Finn felt that all students need a solid foundation in American history-- "not just in that portion that pertains directly to the black experience." They referred here by implication to other minority groups also.⁹

Our own sense is that white students should be as knowledgeable about black history as black students are, because the events and issues that directly affect blacks are important events in American history.

. . . Conversely, we believe that black students should be as knowledgeable about American history in general as White students are. As Americans, they have the same need to comprehend the institutions and laws of the society in which they are citizens. No less than whites, they should be knowledgeable about chronology and geography, about the forces and trends that have shaped the nation they live in. They too need to know who Churchill, Hitler, and Stalin were: they too should know about Watergate, Sputnik, and the Great Depression. They too will be voters and will need the knowledge about the rest of the world that enables them to understand public issues, to become active participants in the democratic process, and to comment critically on the actions of their elected representatives.¹⁰

Regarding the issue of further "relevance," Ravitch and Finn urged educators not to construe the assessment results broadly, nor narrowly along sexual (gender) or racial lines. Teachers are challenged to enable all students, regardless of background, to understand the relevance of literature and history to their own lives and the modern world. Help young people to recognize universal themes and dilemmas in literary works written in other ages and other societies.¹¹ Encourage them to see the significance and consequences of historical decision that were made centuries or decades ago:

. . . You don't have to be Jewish to weep for the men, women, and children who were shepherded into gas chambers during the Holocaust; you don't have to be black to share the despair of the men, women, and children who were crammed into slave ships, bound for a lifetime of slavery in an unknown land.¹²

This universal appeal is not just true of history, but it is also true of great literature which has the capacity to transport us

beyond our own ancestry, our immediate sphere, to mourn with the family of Hector, to cry with Janie (in Their Eyes Were Watching God), to feel devastated by the death of Mrs. Ramsay (in To the Lighthouse), to experience the terror in novels like Darkness at Noon, 1984, and the Painted Bird."¹³

In essence, the best literature is always relevant in the sense that it increases our ability to empathize and therefore "makes us aware of our common humanity."¹⁴

With the above information in mind, the following test was extracted from Ravitch and Finn's general assessment (to be used at the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School). Although the few people present at the workshop agreed that there was a dire need to upgrade the academics, not everyone agreed upon the use of the test; nevertheless, the test that follows is thought-provoking indeed.

Individual Assessment (for students) of a Portion of Literary
"World Knowledge"

Please write the letter of the best answer on the line.

- ___ 1. The Return of the Native, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and The Mayor of Casterbridge were written by
- a. Sir Walter Scott
 - b. Thomas Hardy
 - c. Oscar Wilde
 - d. Robert Louis Stevenson
- ___ 2. Billy Budd, "Benito Cereno," and "Bartleby the Scrivener" were written by
- a. Washington Irving
 - b. Herman Melville
 - c. Jack London
 - d. James Fennimore Cooper
- ___ 3. Aesop is best know for having written
- a. Fables
 - b. dramas
 - c. proverbs
 - d. epic poetry
- ___ 4. In the Bible, King Solomon was famous for
- a. courage
 - b. frugality
 - c. eccentricity
 - d. wisdom

- ___ 5. In Greek mythology, what happened to Atlas?
- He was turned into a tree
 - He had to support the heavens on his shoulders
 - He had to map out the heavens
 - He sat by a pool but was not allowed to drink
- ___ 6. Which mythical Greek hero demonstrated his bravery and cunning during his long journey homeward after fighting in the Trojan War?
- Theseus
 - Achilles
 - Odysseus
 - Telemachus
- ___ 7. What is the moral of Aesop's fable "The Tortoise and the Hare"?
- Slow and steady wins the race
 - Don't trust flatterers
 - The race is to the swift and strong
 - Look before you leap
- ___ 8. Who is the Spanish knight who attacked windmills thinking they were giants?
- Sancho Panza
 - Don Quixote
 - El Cid
 - Zorro
- ___ 9. Julius Caesar by Shakespeare is a play about Caesar's
- discovery of and escape from a plot to kill him
 - ultimate triumph in the Gallic wars
 - death and the fate of his assassins
 - love affair with Cleopatra
- ___ 10. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."
These words are from
- Common Sense
 - the Declaration of Independence
 - Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address
 - The Rights of Man
- ___ 11. Which President said, "And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country"?
- Richard Nixon
 - Theodore Roosevelt

- c. Lyndon Johnson
 - d. John F. Kennedy
- ___ 12. In which novel did a 16-year-old boy who was expelled from school go to New York City for a weekend to find himself?
- a. The Catcher in the Rye
 - b. A Tree Grows in Brooklyn
 - c. The Sun Also Rises
 - d. A Separate Peace
- ___ 13. What is the novel 1984 about?
- a. The destruction of the human race by nuclear war
 - b. A dictatorship in which every citizen was watched in order to stamp out all individuality
 - c. The invasion and ultimate takeover of the earth by creatures from outer space
 - d. A man who went back into time and changed history
- ___ 14. The novel The Scarlet Letter is the story of
- a. the correspondence between a woman and her finance during the Civil War
 - b. the correspondence between a Revolutionary War spy and George Washington
 - c. a woman who was unfaithful and had to observe the effects of her sin on others
 - d. a woman in a New England town who was executed for being a witch
- ___ 15. Two authors who are known for their well-crafted stories set in the American South are
- a. Eudora Welty and Flannery O'Connor
 - b. Louisa May Alcott and Katherine Anne Porter
 - c. William Saroyan and Truman Capote
 - d. Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis
- ___ 16. Which of the following is a play about the experiences of a black family as they made plans to move into an all-white suburban neighborhood?
- a. The River Niger
 - b. A Raisin in the Sun
 - c. Porgy and Bess
 - d. Blues for Mister Charlie
17. Which American poet wrote the volume of poetry Leaves of Grass, which includes the line "I celebrate myself, and sing myself"?

- a. Robert Lowell
 - b. Edna St. Vincent Millay
 - c. Archibald MacLeish
 - d. Walt Whitman
18. Which twentieth-century European statesman said, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat," and "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent"?
- a. Adolf Hitler
 - b. Winston Churchill
 - c. William Gladstone
 - d. Joseph Stalin
- ___ 19. "A penny saved is a penny earned" and "A small leak will sink a great ship" are two maxims from
- a. Solomon's proverbs
 - b. Kipling's Just So Stories
 - c. Aesop's Fables
 - d. Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanac
- ___ 20. Who wrote Native Son, a novel of black life in Chicago, and Black Boy, which is highly autobiographical?
- a. Richard Wright
 - b. Eldridge Cleaver
 - c. LeRoi Jones
 - d. Malcolm X
- ___ 21. Which American poet, who lived mostly in solitude as an adult, wrote frequently about death in such poems as "I heard a Fly buzz--when I died--" and "Because I could not stop for Death--"?
- a. Elizabeth Bishop
 - b. Gwendolyn Brooks
 - c. Emily Dickinson
 - d. Amy Lowell

Assessment

At the end of the workshop, teachers were asked to make an assessment of the presentation by completing the following form:

Meeting of Teachers of English - February 28, 1991

Workshop # 2

Topic: Cultural Literacy and Its Validity

Presenter: Velma Reddick

Your name

1. Do you think this test is a fair representation of what seventeen-year-old students should know?
 Yes
 No
 I do not know.

2. My opinion is that this test (for our students) would be
 very easy
 sufficiently challenging
 too difficult
Other opinion: _____

3. Should we give this test to our students here at the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School?

4. As far as my own students are concerned,
 I am curious as to how they would score.
 I have no desire to give them this test.
 I don't mind giving the test, but I would like for the presenter to tally the scores.
 I have no opinion.

5. If and when this test is given, how should we utilize the results?
 Gear some of our teaching to the unlearned material.
 Gear some of our teaching to the unlearned material for a future post test.
 Do nothing.
Other answer: _____

A question by question tally of teacher responses to the assessment follows:

1.	Yes	2
	No	2
	I don't know.	1
2.	Very easy	0
	Sufficiently challenging	1
	Too difficult	4
3.	Yes	2
	No	1
	I don't know.	1
4.	I am curious as to how they would score.	2
	I have no desire to give this test.	2
	I don't mind giving the test, but I would like for the presenter to tally the score.	0
	I have no opinion.	0
5.	Gear some of our teaching to the unlearned material.	1
	Gear some of our teaching to the unlearned material for a future post test.	1
	Do nothing.	1

On three of the assessment forms, three teachers chose to qualify some of their answers. Those comments follow.

To "Other answer:" in question # 1, P.F. replied: "Only because I do not think that we teach some of this material." Her "Other answer:" to # 3 was: "as a means of finding out what they know and do not know."

For "Other answer:" in # 1, D. S. replied: "Not nowadays, because they lack the motivation needed." Her "Other answer:" for # 3 was: "You could, just to see what they actually know."

At the conclusion of her assessment, R. B. commented:

The general scope and range of this type of testing is done with students who, over a period of many years, have acquired such knowledge from early on in their exposure to literature and education. This type of exposure is not acquired overnight. There must be parental influence (working with formal ed. structure) and a certain climate is fundamental for a trend toward this type of learning to exist. Not that it is not admirable; however, my thinking sees testing--of this type as a waste of time and effort since we can almost be certain from the start, that such results from testing of this type would be disastrous.

Any results from this type of testing serves only to increase one's personal educational awareness; to reward personal satisfaction and/or achievement; to serve as a vehicle for exchange of ideas on a social level, and to reach for similar goals, hopefully.

Reiterating this apparent tone of despair, the presenter of this workshop capsulized Allan Bloom's critique of American education from a general perspective. Admittedly, some of Bloom's statements are controversial, but nevertheless, worthy of attention. Not only did he renounce the caliber of education in the American

university as a whole, but he also disparaged the European university as well, stating that it too has undergone an evolution.¹⁵

Bloom's debatable concept of the closure or narrowing that has taken place in the American mentality can essentially be described or encapsulated in this manner:

This collapse is directly traceable to both the teachings and the deeds of the universities in the sixties. More important than the bad teachers and the self-indulgent doctrines was the disappearance of the reasons for and the models of--for example--"the king's English." The awareness of the highest is what points the lower upward. Now, it may be possible, with a lot of effort and political struggle, to return to earlier standards of accomplishment in the three R's, but it will not be so easy to recover the knowledge of philosophy, history and literature that was trashed. That was never a native plant. (We were dependent on Europe for it . . . In the meantime, Europe itself . . . has undergone an evolution similar to our own, and we cannot go there to train ourselves as we once could.¹⁶

According to Bloom, it was necessary for us to have tradition to keep us in contact with the store of authentic learning which emanated from the heads of the great scholars. The American link to European tradition has been broken and it is difficult to renew, contended Bloom.¹⁷

Neither aristocrats nor priests, the natural bearers of high intellectual tradition, exist in any meaningful sense in America. The greatest of thoughts were in our political principles but were never embodied, hence not living in our class of men. Their home in America was the university, and the violation of that home was the crime of the sixties. Calming the universities down, stopping grade inflation, making students study, all that may be salutary, but it does not go to the heart of the matter. There is much less in the university to study now.¹⁸

While it is certainly axiomatic that a liberal education should encompass a comprehensive study of what is called "traditional" or "classical" literature, of equal importance is the recognition and acknowledgment of African-American literary talent and merit.

In view of the disclosures cited in The Signifying Monkey, The notion that American education is empty and insipid, having irretrievably lost its European and Western influence of substance is apparently unfounded and certainly arguable. Henry Louis Gates Jr. cited W.E.B. DuBois's feelings on the general subject as expressed in the June 1934 final issue of The Crisis:

In this period of frustration and disappointment, we must turn from negation to affirmation, from the everlasting "yes." Instead of drowning our originality in imitation of mediocre White folks . . . [we] have a right to affirm that the Negro race is one of the great human races, inferior to none in its accomplishments and in its ability.¹⁹

Gates also quoted an 1887 published statement by John H. Smythe:

If there is any fault with us it is that we are always aping somebody else the Negro is now a distinct, and ever will be a distinct race in this country. Blood--not language and religion--makes social distinctions. We are therefore bound by every drop of blood that flows in our being, and by whatever of self-respect you and I individually and collectively possess, to make ourselves--not on the pattern of any other race, but actuated by our peculiar genius in literature, religion, commerce and social intercourse--a great people.²⁰

In observing the teachers' reactions and reading their responses to the "World Knowledge" assessment, it is possible that they felt somewhat inept and possibly intimidated. This might be a natural consequence to being somewhat "put on the spot" even though they themselves were not asked to take the test. Most teachers, however, would probably in good conscience, like to feel secure in the knowledge of the material they are presenting to their students, even if it is only part of a survey.

"There is nothing shameful about admitting that you don't know something."²¹ In fact, the impetus for most of the research and work in this staff development project is an outgrowth of that concept. Even though that statement was made by Ravitch and Finn in reference to a preferred confession of ignorance by students rather than random guessing on the assessment, it certainly is applicable to teachers and other staff as well.

Because no one can know everything, it is possible to spend one's lifetime studying literature or history "without reading every important book or learning about every significant event."²² What is desirable though, is that students (and teachers also) learn to distinguish between the important and unimportant and that they

. . . know enough about literature to distinguish for themselves what is fine and what is dross; that they know enough about history to inform themselves about the vital connections between the present and the past; that they cultivate a desire to learn more; and they acquire a foundation of knowledge on which to build for the rest of their lives.²³

Workshop # 3:
Using Educational Tools of African-American
Culture As a Possible Link to Cultural Literacy

With the foregoing information and assessment results in mind, the next workshop (Workshop # 3) was designed to expose teachers to and familiarize them with teaching tools and materials that might be of high interest and motivation to the Roosevelt students. That workshop was entitled **Using Educational Tools of African-American Culture As A Possible Link to Cultural Literacy** and was introduced with reference to the results of the nation-wide assessment of high school students (National Assessment for Educational Progress) as documented in Chester Finn's and Diane Ravitch's What Do Our 17-Year Olds Know?

After the introduction, the presenter (this researcher) demonstrated the use of the itemized materials (as listed on the assessment form) and offered it for perusal by the teachers present. During the examination of the materials and light-hearted chatter, R. V. stated that she learned Black history at home and objected to so much emphasis being put on Black history for motivational purposes. Students, according to her, should pick themselves up and go to the library to learn these things. She further stated that students are only paying lip service to this. They don't really want to learn. She stated that even one month devoted to Black history is absurd: How much can students learn in one month? At this point, N. J. felt that these types of things could further alienate the students from the "mainstream."

Then R. V. related the fact that many people in her hometown had first hand contact with and information about Black inventors and other note-worthy African-

Americans. Later, upon her leaving the South and living in Harlem, a frequent visitor to her house was the son of the noted archivist and historian, Arthur Schomburg. In fact, she shared an anecdote on the subject and everyone chuckled.

On an additional positive note, the researcher shared the fact that she had never ever heard of Ira Aldridge, an African-American Shakespearean actor who won international acclaim, receiving medals from the kings of Austria and Prussia.²⁴ Perhaps such information pertaining to him would be a good introduction to the unit on Shakespeare (currently taught in grades nine through twelve at the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School).

After the interchange of ideas and comments, teachers completed the following assessment form:

Assessment

Meeting of Teachers of English

March 26, 1991 and March 27, 1991

Workshop # 3 - Presenter: Velma Reddick

Topic: Using Educational Tools of African-American

Culture As a Possible Link to Cultural Literacy

I. Display and Examination of Available Materials:

Item # 1 - Afro-Bets: First Book About Africa

Item # 2 - Afro-Bets: Book of Black Heroes

Item # 3 - Golden Legacy Illustrated History Magazines

Item # 4 - African-American Bingo (The Classic Bingo Game With History added)

II. Assessment

- ___ 1. Do you think these materials can be of use to us as teachers?
- ___ 2. Do you think that they will be well-received by our students?
- ___ 3. How do you think exposure to these materials will affect them?
- a) Enhance their self-esteem
 - b) Diminish their self-esteem
 - c) Not affect their self esteem
 - d) I don't know.
- ___ 4. Would you like to use these materials?
- ___ 5. Do you see a way that we can connect any of these materials (information) to anything we are required to teach?
- ___ 6. How?
- a) I know, but do not have the time to explain now.
 - b) I don't know.
 - c) I am willing to try to help find a way.
 - d) I have no opinion.
- ___ 7. a) I have enjoyed this workshop.
b) I did not enjoy this workshop.
c) I have no opinion.

Name _____

For this workshop (# 3), the tally was as follows:

Part II.

- | | | |
|----|-----|---------------|
| 1. | Yes | 2 and 1 Maybe |
| 2. | Yes | 2 and 1 Maybe |
| 3. | a) | 2 |

	b)	0
	c)	0
	d)	1
4.	Yes	2 and 1 Maybe
5.	Yes	3
6.	a)	0
	b)	0
	c)	2/with one qualifying answer
7.	a)	2 and no comment at all
	b)	0
	c)	0

Some teachers gave qualifying answers or comments that follow. For question # 6, B. S. checked off nothing but wrote: "they can be used incidentally when the information has bearing on the curriculum, but I don't know that the materials will make a significant difference in achievement levels."

In the dialogue and exchange of ideas, it was suggested that teachers share with students the underlying pivotal concept, informing them that these high interest materials are being utilized to motivate them and sustain that motivation toward increased academic achievement. The unmistakable message of teacher expectation should be imparted to students explicitly and implicitly while utilizing all available culturally enriching material.

In the section called "Expecting the Worst . . . and Getting It," Dent said:

One of the first barriers to academic success for many African-American male students is low teacher expectations, which can lead to them being misclassified or placed in slow learners' classes. Studies have shown that student performance often parallels teacher expectations: Children blossom in classrooms where teachers nurture and encourage them, and they wither when teachers don't think they can learn. For the past decade, many researchers have documented that both white and black teachers have low expectations of Black students.²⁴

In fact, the section called "When White Is Always Right," epitomizes one main fallacy of the American educational system:

Many educators believe that the lack of emphasis on African and African-American culture, history and achievement in the school curriculum undermines the academic progress of Black children and allows the negative influence of a destructive peer culture to take its hold on Black boys. Studies show that public schools do not teach students about the preslavery heritage of African-Americans. Thus many Black youngsters, and white ones as well, have a false sense of the position of Africans and Africans-Americans in world history. Many youngsters believe that whites have a monopoly on intellectual pursuits and creativity because that is what their history books tell them.²⁵

Many Black teachers as well as White teachers are unable to teach Black students about their history because they (the teachers) themselves--products of the American school system--know little about African or African-American history.²⁶ Additionally and unfortunately, "most school systems don't require them to broaden their horizons."²⁷

The section called "Making the Difference" is a metaphorical call for warfare against miseducation as one solution to the problem. "The strongest weapon against the miseducation of Black boys is parental support, guidance and involvement in the educational process--no matter the family's income or class."²⁸

An earnest effort on the parts of parents and educators to utilize the same or similar ethnocentric materials might be a motivation to higher academic achievement for boys as well as girls. Such an effort might also result in a positive impact, serving as a precursor to enhanced cultural literacy.

Workshop #4:
Using One Mode of African-American Culture As A
Link to General Cultural Literacy: The Rap

On April, 30, 1991, the fourth workshop was held and five teachers attended. The topic was **Using One Mode of African-American Culture As a Link to General Cultural Literacy: The Rap**. The presenter (this researcher) gave a brief recapitulation of the previous workshops, stating the dissertational topic and the purpose of the meeting. Then a professionally prepared rap tape of Lord of the Flies (the novel by William Golding) was played. Other professional tapes were displayed for perusal. Lastly, the researcher distributed copies of a rap (lyrics and music composed by her) and played the tape, "We Are Here to Learn."

Some teachers expressed an interest and inquired as to whether or not rap tapes of other literary classics were available for purchase. A copy of the "World Knowledge" or Cultural Literacy test was distributed for teachers to examine. Concerning all presented materials displayed, comments were as follows:

“The kids today need more exciting ways of being taught.”

“It depends on who the teachers are and if they are willing to adapt.”

“Aaah”

“This is neat!

“This is fabulous!”

One teacher related her learning experience in the fifth grade. She said she had a “crazy” teacher but learned more with that teacher than with any other.

Although the positive responses were encouraging, the researcher explained how some people have rejected her approach and suggestion for making lessons on required curriculum more palatable. She admitted that she had received more criticism than anything else. A suggestion to try a control group was well taken.

On the next day, another session of this same workshop was held after school. Two teachers attended. N. J. wondered whether or not “these materials will muddy the issue” as to whether our students will achieve. She related incidents of bringing her personal African-American literature by Claude McKay and Richard Wright. She wondered if works by these authors really hold any special meaning for them: “Most education nowadays looks like fun.”

There was a discussion about the educational rap composed by the researcher. Both teachers lambasted the use of “gimmicks” although they complimented the researcher on the message in the rap. These teachers agreed “that education is work and that this is not what the students want to do.” Their summation was: “Black history or reading and trying to understand Black literature (by Black authors) is

work.” A good portion of the discussion was also an indictment of parental responsibility for most of the academic underachievement in the school.

For both sessions of this workshop, teachers were asked to complete the following assessment form:

Description of Exhibits

Meeting of teachers of English - April 30, 1991

Workshop # 4

Topic: Using One Mode of African-American Culture
As a Link to General Cultural Literacy:
The Rap

Presenter: Velma Reddick

Your

name

- I. Exhibit # 1 - An Educational Rap: “We Are Here to Learn: - composed by Velma Reddick
 - A. Pre-Post Test
 - B. Vocabulary (44 words)
 - C. Lyrics

- II. Exhibit # 2 - RAPOLA CLASSIC RAP
 - A. “Nature, Human Nature” (Lord of the Flies by William Goldberg)
 - B. “Freedom” (The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain)
 - C. “See the Light in the Forest” (The Light in the Forest by Conrad Richter)
 - D. “Get a Red Badge of Courage” (Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane)
 - E. “The Billy Budd Rap” (Billy Budd by Herman Melville)

Assessment

III. Your Assessment

1. Do you think rap is a viable teaching tool? Yes No
2. Do you think it will spark more interest and motivation among our students? Yes No
3. What effect do you think "educational rap" will have on their achievement or test performance?
 very little
 none
 great
 I have no opinion.
4. Have you ever thought of using rap or any other art form as a teaching tool? Yes No
5. If yes, what did you have in mind?
6. These materials are being made available to you as part of the English resource Area in the library. Would you like to use them?
 Yes
 No
7. Did you enjoy this workshop?
 Yes
 No
 I have no opinion.

The assessment tally follows:

1.	Yes	5
	No	0
2.	Yes	4
	No	0
3.	Very little	0

	None	0
	Great	4
	I have no opinion.	0
4.	Yes	3
	No	2
5.	N/A	
6.	Yes	4
	No	0
7.	Yes	5
	No	0

Some additional written qualifying answers and comments were noted. M. I. (a special education math teacher), in response to question # 6, wrote: "They are not appropo to anything I do." Since that time, the researcher has learned of the availability of math rap tapes and ordered one. To question # 5, F. L., a special education language arts and history teacher, expressed an interest in "Music & art in American history/demonstration of student art and dance." Also responding to question # 5, J. S. another special education teacher of English wrote: "I would like to compose a rap which includes the eight parts of speech, and of vocabulary words used in class."

Two other teachers also wrote comments on their forms. To question # 3, R. A. wrote " great" and added " I happen to share your observation and conviction that not every student learns by traditional presentations. Using the "rap" approach as a

supplement is definitely in order. Thanks Velma (He drew a "happy" face.) In answer to #3, L. F. was cautious. He wrote: "I would hope great, but we must await the pre and post assessment. To questions 4, 5, and 7, he wrote "definitely" after checking "yes" to each. In response to # 5, he wrote "Personal learning tapes, motivational and inspirational tapes, video productions to have students take home, etc. Create more multicultural material . . . Throw away some of our books! (only serious, kidding)"

Certainly, it is feasible to employ some non-traditional strategies and more multicultural materials in planning and teaching lessons. In his chapter on "Learning Styles, " Kunjufu was asked about the "split brain" theory and to "describe how it is applicable to different methodologies of learning inside the classroom. Kunjufu explained the functions of the two hemispheres of the brain: the left brain is analytical and is geared to logic--compatible to math and science while the right side of the brain sees the larger picture, is relational, emotional and intuitive--geared toward sports and music.²⁹

When asked to give five examples of right and left brain lesson plans Kunjufu replied:

an example of a left brain lesson plan would be to read a definition and write the definition. Another example of a left brain lesson plan would be teaching someone how to dance by using floor mats and numbering the, and then having the child move from one mat to another.³⁰

Ideally, the best situation offers a whole brain lesson plan, rather than going from one extreme to another. He cited the coordination of music and rap with math and phonics. Kunjufu's organization distributes

a product called "Wordbuster Reading Rap: which blends the strength of music and rap with rules of phonics . . . [If] . . . children can memorize all those words from a rap record, which . . . is a skill, they can remember whatever we present in that same format."³¹

With just that concept in mind, the researcher had already composed an educational rap entitled, "We Are Here to Learn" (shared early in the workshop session along with the professional tapes). The rap (which follows) addresses some of the ills of society at large, problems in the high school specifically, and at the same time teaches vocabulary words that frequently occur on the SAT and in recommended high school literature.

Educational Rap: "We Are Here to Learn"
(Composed by Velma Reddick)

My name is "Miss"
Run V-E-L.
I have a message
For you to tell.

Just come right in
And sit yourself down.
Don't fool around,
And do not clown.

Just close your mouth,
And meditate.
Don't agitate,
And don't instigate.

Perk up your ears
And begin to listen.

Purify your thoughts,
New words to christen.

Do not worry
About your looks.
The important thing

Is to hit the books!

Make sure that you
Participate.
Don't sit in class
And vegetate.

Be diligent
And assiduous,
Putting forth an effort
That's continuous.

Let's all just try
To collaborate,
Resolving not
To aggravate.

Put your English
Lessons to use.
Rise above the level
Of obscene abuse.

Go to school
Each and everyday.
Listen to what
Your teachers have to say.

Refuse to loiter
In the hall.
Make sure you heed
Your teacher's call.

I advise you not
To cut any class.
Accept the challenge,
And face each task.

Don't go to class
And be a pest.
Because you don't
Want to take your test.

Be courteous
And show respect.
Then your attitude

Will be correct.

If you do not want
To go to school and learn,
Take any job,
An honest living to earn.

Education is
An essential tool.
If you don't know that,
You might be a fool!

(Refrain: 2 times)

I 'm here to teach, (said by the teacher)
And we are here to learn! (said by the students)

Our society is plagued
With so much vice.
Be careful or you
They will try to entice.

Arguing and fighting
Each other,
Showing hate
To your sister and your brother.

Just as you
Do not eat bugs,
Stay very far
Away from drugs.

For they will change
Your personality,
And cause you to
Lose morality.

Alcoholic beverages
You should not drink.
Keep your mind clear,
So you can think.

Smoking slows down
Your circulation,
Overworking your heart,

Causing blood stagnation.

Anyone who will
An old person mug,
Is just a sadistic,
Inhumane thug.

A pusillanimous punk!
A malodorous skunk! (Repeat both lines.)

Snatching and stealing
Other people's gold,
Committing vicious and horrible
Crimes untold.

A pure and chaste life
Will give your mind ease.
And help to combat
Venereal disease.

Before you decide
To parent a child,
Have something to offer
That is worthwhile.

Conduct yourself
In a manner that's clean.
And try to raise
Your self-esteem.

Be honest and do not
Prevaricate.
With the law
You should cooperate.

Keep on striving,
Trying hard to learn.
Planning one day
High wages to earn.

Work very hard
And do not fear.
Reach for the stars
As you persevere.

Education is
A very precious jewel.
If you do not treasure it,
You're not too cool.

(Refrain: 2 times)

Young people approach the classroom with their own uniqueness and individuality. Teachers "need to first of all acknowledge, understand, and develop compatible, appropriate lesson plans."³² If this is done, perhaps students' interest will be sparked, thereby facilitating greater productivity.

In their article called "Original Spin," Lesley Dornen and Peter Edidin cited psycholinguist Vera John-Steiner, author of Notebooks of the Mind: Explorations of Thinking, who maintains that

creative thought is a "search for meaning," a way to connect our inner sense of being with some aspect of the world that preoccupies us. And she believes that only by linking these two aspects of reality--the inner and the outer-- can we gain "some sense of being in control of life."³³

Countering the fact that it is traditional to believe the myth that creativity is serendipitous and rare--belonging only to the elect or the genius, Lesley Dornen and Peter Edidin quoted John Briggs, author of Fire In the Crucible: The Alchemy of Creative Genius. Dornen and Edidin corroborated Briggs' observation of the common tendency to associate the lack of creativity with one's self-image and the concomitant rationalizations of these erroneous beliefs.³⁴

In the section of their article called "Mindlessness vs. Mindfulness," Dornen and Edidin concurred with Briggs' assertion that each person desires to share his or

her vision of the world with others but is hindered from doing so because of having been taught that it is wrong to do or look at things differently. People lose confidence in themselves and see reality only in terms of the categories and boundaries which society dictates.³⁵

Dormen and Edidin maintained that this state of routinized conformity and passive learning was appropriately called mindlessness by Harvard Professor of psychology, Ellen Langer. After fifteen years of extensive research, Langer and her colleagues found that people often deny their individual selves and the perceptions and prompting of their own minds when they behave automatically and mindlessly. They tend to limit the capacity for creative response. Mired and bogged down in a numbing daily routine, they often relinquish the capacity to think and act independently.³⁶

Conversely, Langer found that when we are mindful, we avoid reflexive or rigid behavior in favor of a more intuitive and improvisational response to life. We are more in touch with the world around us. This mindful attitude engenders qualities that are characteristic of creative people. People who are most likely to be creative are those who can open themselves up to new information and surprise because they can free themselves of mind-sets. They can change perspective and context as they “focus on process rather than outcome . . . whether they are scientists, artists, or cooks.”³⁷

In a section of “Original Spin” called “Creating the Right Atmosphere,” Dormen and Edidin contended that comprehending the basis of creativity, transcending the myths to understand your creative potential and recognizing your ability to free yourself of old ways of thinking are the three initial steps to a more creative life. “The

fourth is finding ways to work that encourage personal commitment and expressiveness.”³⁸

Staff members who have complained that they have no talent and are not creative, need only to realize that innovation is “likely to be found wherever bright and eager people think they can find it.”³⁹ Regardless of the profession, creativity forges beyond given boundaries into newness “and almost invariably, when the mind exercises its creative muscle, it also generates a sense of pleasure.”⁴⁰

Workshop # 4 did not purport to vehemently espouse the use of rap tapes or rap only as a motivational teaching tool. It was hoped, however, that teachers would give credence and plausibility to their own individual talents and non-traditional modes of expression in their areas of expertise. They might use such techniques as a means to bring students to the desired educational level. In exerting their creative efforts, perhaps the end result will be higher test scores and a general increase in “world knowledge” or cultural literacy.

Workshop #5:

Developing the English Department Resource Area

Due to time constraints and difficulties in scheduling, the final workshop--a culmination of the entire project--was held at the researcher's home, and only two teachers attended. The topic was **Developing An English Department Resource Area**. As an introduction, the presenter reviewed the underlying concepts of the

previous workshops and all materials from said workshops were perused and discussed. M.F. (former English department chairperson and former assistant principal) offered to share titles of suggested materials for Black history. Upon seeing Up Your Scores, an SAT preparation book being displayed, M. F. remarked that the book was excellent because it did not look like the other books and was therefore more appealing to students.

Both M. F. and D. S. offered to make contributions to the resource area and suggested that each teacher be asked to donate one copy of every ditto used.

Assessment

For this final workshop, the following assessment form was used:

Meeting of Teachers of English - May 22, 1991

Workshop # 5

Topic: Developing the English Department Resource
Area

Presenter: Velma Reddick

Your name _____

- I. Restatement of dissertation topic:
Developing an English Department Resource Area with Emphasis on Using African-American Culture As a Link to General Cultural Literacy
- II. Summary of previous workshop activities with exhibition and review of resource materials
 - A. "Where There's A Will, There's An 'A' "

- B. Cultural Literacy and Its Validity (How should we utilize the cultural literacy test results?)
- C. Using Educational tools of African-American Culture As a Link to Cultural Literacy: The Rap

III. Developing the English Department Resource Area (in the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School library)

- A. Volunteers for contributions of materials for the file cabinet
- B. Types of materials needed

IV. Assessments

- ___ 1. Do you think these materials can be of use to you as a teacher?
- ___ 2. Are you willing to contribute resource materials for the file cabinet?
- ___ 3. Do you feel that greater collaboration among teachers is needed?
- ___ 4. If yes, how do you think this will affect our students?
 - a. increase their achievement levels
 - b. decrease their achievement levels
 - c. have no effect on them
 - d. I don't know.
- ___ 5. Our file cabinet should contain
 - a. worksheets
 - b. tests and quizzes
 - c. notes (or summaries) on specific literary works
 - d. the materials presented in the previous workshops
 - e. all of the above
- ___ 6. Is there any subject or item of importance that you think should have been covered? If so, please elaborate.

_____ .

_____ .

- ___ 7. Did you enjoy this workshop?

The response tally of this workshop is as follows:

IV.	1.	Yes	2
		No	0

2.	Yes	2
	No	0
3.	Yes	2
	No	0
4.	a)	2
	b)	0
	c)	0
	d)	0
5.	a)	0
	b)	0
	c)	0
	d)	0
	e)	2
6.	N/A	
7.	Yes	2
	No	0

An added comment was written for question # 6 by M. F.: "The workshop covers many areas of worth."

As previously state, there is a great need to familiarize students with the great writers of the past who have shaped our culture and those of the present who are continuing to shape our culture. Careful reading of good literature is

an excellent way to develop critical thinking skills
 Attention to meaning, to detail, to nuance, to differing interpretations and to a writer's language can be a

wonderful exercise in developing what educators refer to as higher order cognitive skills.⁴⁰

According to Ravitch and Finn, a conscientious effort by scholars, teachers, and curriculum planners to teach the best literature appropriate to age and ability should

incorporate works by some unjustly neglected writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and will enlarge the attention paid to superb authors such as Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright, known now to so few students. It should cause a revival of interest in writers long recognized as giants who have slipped out of the regular curriculum and into the niche reserved for classes for the "gifted and talented." Were there more time for literature in the curriculum, there would be opportunity to introduce the best writers from other countries as well.⁴¹

Briefly stated, the underlying concept of the English department resource area epitomizes effective collaboration. If faculty and staff espouse and practice collaboration, it is conceivable that its rippling effect on students would prove to be academically successful.

. . . When schools simplistically rank individuals through test scores, they ignore the fact that both high achievers and school leaders have to work together to maintain future communities. Teachers have to demonstrate their own enthusiasm and competence, convey a renewed sense of purpose to students and colleagues, and effectively overcome the barriers to change. When improved instruction breaks through the negative forces imposed on schools serving low income and minority neighborhoods, staff can take pride in their professional standards.⁴²

Notes

¹E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 107 & 108.

²Ibid.

³Jawanza Kunjufu, Critical Issues in Educating African-American Youth: A talk With Jawanza (Chicago: African American Images, 1989), p. 2.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 3.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn, What Do Our 17-Year-Olds know? A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1988), p. 7.

⁸Ibid., p. 249.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 250.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 321.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 321 & 322.

¹⁹Henry Louis Gates, Jr., The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 114.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ravitch and Finn, p. 246.

²²Ibid., p. 253.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Leronne Bennett Jr., Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America The Classic Account of the Struggles and Triumphs of Black Americans (5th ed.), (New York: Johnson Publishing 1984), p. 173.

²⁵David J. Dent, "Reading, 'Ritin' & Rage: How Schools Are Destroying Black Boys," Essence, November 1989, p. 55.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 56- 59.

²⁷Ibid., p. 59.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Jawanza Kunjufu, Critical Issues in Educating African American Youth: A Talk With Jawanza (Chicago: African American Images, 1989), p. 35.

³⁰Ibid., p. 36.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., p. 39.

³³Lesley Dornen and Peter Edidin "Original Spin," Psychology Today, July/August 1989, p. 49.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 49 & 50.

³⁷Ibid., p. 50.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁰Ravitch and Finn, p. 219.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Byrd L. Jones and Robert W. Maloy, *Partnerships for Improving Schools* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 108 & 109.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS OF WORKSHOPS

Effectiveness of the Resource Area As a Staff Development Tool, Possible Modifications for Use in Other Settings, and Implications for Further Research

Because there is a notable paucity in cultural literacy or “world knowledge” in schools across the country and in the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School particularly, five workshops were conducted for the purpose of addressing and possibly correcting the problem. This chapter will briefly recapitulate the outcomes and/or conclusions of those workshops, focusing on and implementing the results of the final workshop as a viable staff development tool.

At the close of the first workshop, **“Where There’s A Will, There’s An ‘A’,”** the most salient observation was that the material would not best serve the student body of the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School because of lack of appeal. It was generally felt that while this material was excellent, the presentation by Professor Claude Olney was dull, monotonous, and geared to a predominantly White student body. In fact, these sentiments were expressed mainly by the Caucasian teachers who attended the session. The consensus of opinion was that Roosevelt students would have difficulty identifying with the students shown in the video.

E.D. Hirsch, in speaking on the subject of cultural literacy stated that it is not a WASP culture--belonging to any specific ethnic group. It is open because it is constantly and essentially changing.¹

. . . What is needed is recognition that the accurate metaphor or model for this wider literacy is not domination, but dialectic; each group participates and contributes, transforms and is transformed, as much as any other group”²

Because some of the English teachers work closely with the reading teachers, often directing and concentrating their efforts toward certain “at-risk” students, the poignant observation that many students need one-on-one instruction was well taken. It was determined that the information gained from that workshop tended to be best received by students who were already motivated and academically oriented.

In most public school systems and certainly in the Roosevelt School District, “the one-to-one relation between learner and teacher is rarely available.”³ The more common situation is the one which assigns one teacher to 30 students, with little time for the teacher to address learning problems or give individualized instruction.⁴ One outcome of workshop # 1 then was a greater effort toward increasing the availability of such a program.

As indicated in chapter four of this dissertation, the consensus of opinion of the teachers present was that too many of the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School Students are not achieving on grade level. It is possible that one of the causes for this underachievement is a lack of cultural literacy; therefore, the topic of the second workshop was entitled “**Cultural Literacy and Its Validity.**”

Although not all members of the 17-year old generation are equally at risk, educators cannot afford to be complacent with the status quo. Citing a pattern as old as civilization itself, Ravitch and Finn stated that a society’s elite generally strives to

ensure that its posterity acquires a sufficient amount of the cultural lore, the knowledge, and the intellectual traits that will assure success in that society.⁵ Now this success, whether it is measured by wealth, social status, public office, business acumen or prestige, cannot necessarily be attributed to an in-depth knowledge of literature and history, but

one's prospects certainly are enhanced by being "culturally literate." Hence we can take for granted that the elite will continue to do its best to equip its own children with this knowledge and to send them to schools that furnish substantial quantities of it. But neither our culture, or politics, our civic life, nor our principles of equal opportunity can be satisfactorily maintained if large numbers of youngsters enter adulthood with little knowledge of this kind.⁶

For those individuals who feel that the assessed 17-year-olds "did better than might have been expected" or did "well enough," this researcher shares the sentiments of the writers in stating that this attitude is irksome.⁷ Such a stance typifies the kind of elitism which must never be condoned by citizens of a democratic society.

We cannot settle for an education system that imparts "passable" amounts of important knowledge to its more fortunate students while the majority learn less than the minimum required for successful participation in the society they are about to enter. To rest content with a "half-full glass" is to condone mediocrity as well as inequality.⁸

Hirsch cited William Raspberry's comments on test results which show that Black students tend to score 35 to 45 % lower than White students on standardized achievement tests.⁹ According to Raspberry, one reason for this is that White children come to school with a basic knowledge of what society deems to be important and

therefore find it easier to learn more of the same kinds of things.¹⁰ Hirsch not only agreed with Raspberry on this issue regarding achievement tests but also felt that the initial deficit experienced by Black children affected their reading and writing skills as well. Hirsch corroborated the reasons for this disparity with the findings of Dr. Jeanne Chall, C. Snow and others as reported in Families and Literacy and Anderson and others in Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading.

Chall said that

. . . the technical reading skills of disadvantaged children at age six are still on a par with those of children from literate families. Yet only a year or so later, their reading skills being to diverge according to socioeconomic status, chiefly because low-income pupils lack elementary cultural knowledge. Supplying missing knowledge to children early is of tremendous importance for enhancing their motivation and intellectual self-confidence, not to mention their subsequent ability to learn new materials. Yet schools will never systematically import missing background information as long as they continue to accept the formalistic principle that specific information is irrelevant to "language arts skills."¹¹

As previously noted, the third workshop entitled **Using Educational Tools of African-American Culture As a Possible Link to Cultural Literacy** displayed and emphasized the use of afrocentric materials as an attention-getter, with the intent of sparking enough student interest to thereby serve as a link to general cultural literacy and high academic achievement.

Benjamin Bloom stated that evidence suggests students "who are low in academic self-concept may be high, average, or low in nonacademic self-concept."

Students who are low in both are probably in great difficulty and it is estimated "that

this may be true for up to one-half of the students who are low in academic self-concept.”¹²

The individual, Bloom maintained, who is denied positive reassurance of his academic worth “is impelled to seek positive reassurance of his worth wherever he can find it.”¹³ If a student finds satisfying and financially rewarding work opportunities in society, he or she will likely exhibit positive characteristics of self-worth. On the other hand,

. . . in a highly developed society like the United States, negative indications of school achievement (including school dropouts) are likely to provide serious barriers against securing skilled or higher occupational employment. Some individuals must turn to less socially approved areas (e.g. gangs, illicit activities) to find the rewards and self-approval denied them in school and school-related activities.¹⁴

Because these statements are true of modern American society, the researcher addressed many of the ills of society and public school life in the educational rap, entitled “We Are Here to Learn.” the effect of that rap has been the subject of much conversation and unmistakable interest among students, with many of them memorizing its lyrics. The tape of that rap and other “educational” rap tapes with accompanying printed lyrics were displayed and discussed in the fourth workshop: **Using One Mode of African-American Culture As a Link to General Cultural Literacy: The Rap.** Since many teachers have shown interest in these materials, an effort has been initiated to make them part of the resource area in the school library.

The rap, of course, was advocated as only one form or mode of Afrocentric materials which have been useful in the effort to present lessons in a more interesting

way. Critics might inculcate the underlying concept of this art form (the rap) into the argument against "ethnic cheerleading," but Carter G. Woodson explained that he has not suggested that any people ignore the record or facts of progress of other races, for that would be unwise.¹⁵ He admonished that the real facts of history should be retained as they are, but that those facts should be complemented by also studying

the history of races and nations which have been purposely ignored. We should not underrate the achievement of Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome; but we should give equally as much attention to the internal African kingdoms, the Songhay empire, and Ethiopia, which through Egypt decidedly influenced the civilization of the Mediterranean World.¹⁶

Woodson maintained that the achievements of all peoples should be acknowledged. Ecclesiastical development and the rise of Christianity should not be ignored, but there should be honorable mention of those persons of African ancestry who played a viable part in that development. Entrepreneurs of modern industrial and commercial expansion should be credited for producing great wealth, but so should "the Negro who so largely supplied the demand for labor by which these things have been accomplished."¹⁷

Woodson spoke metaphorically as he said that each star in the firmament of American history would be afforded equal luster.¹⁸

We would not learn George Washington, "First in War, First in Peace and First in the hearts of his countrymen;" but we would learn something also of the three thousand Negro soldiers of the American Revolution who helped to make this "Father of our Country" possible.¹⁹

As Americans continue to appreciate the extraordinary contributions of Thomas Jefferson to democracy and freedom, we would also note two of his exemplary contemporaries, Phyllis Wheatley, the ingenious poet; and Benjamin Banneker, the astronomer, mathematician “ and advocate of a world peace plan set forth in 1793 with the vital principles of Woodrow Wilson’s League of Nations.”²⁰

In the account of the second struggle with England, there would be no effort to detract from the fame of Perry (on Lake Erie) or Jackson (at New Orleans), but the courageous Black men who assisted in these memorable triumphs on sea and on land would also be applauded.²¹

While we continue to pay tribute to Abraham Lincoln as the “Savior of the country”, . . . we would ascribe praise also the one hundred seventy-eight thousand Negroes who had to be mustered into the service of the Union before it could be preserved, and who by their heroism demonstrated that they were entitled to freedom and citizenship.²²

Several decades ago, Woodson explained that the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History maintained that the Negro’s past depicts nothing more shameful than past deeds committed by other races despite the disparagement by the oppressor. Like others, the Negro has been up and at other times, he has been down. The oppressor has taught Blacks that they have no worthwhile past and that his race has accomplished nothing of significance from antiquity and that there was no evidence or indication that he would ever achieve anything great. In order to avoid wasting time attempting to do the impossible, Blacks were taught that their education had to be carefully monitored.²³

This belief, according to Woodson, was instilled in the Black man for the purpose of controlling his thinking, thereby obviating the need to worry about his plan of action. The oppressor would "not have to tell him to go to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door he will have one cut for his special benefit."²⁴

Woodson's contention was that if Blacks are taught that they have accomplished as much good as any other race, they will aspire to equality and justice regardless to race. This effort would thwart the oppressor's insidious program in Africa and America which is as follows: Remind the Black man of his crimes and shortcomings. Teach him to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton. Induce the Black man to detest anyone of African ancestry--in essence, hate himself.²⁵ With these seeds of self-effacement planted, the ground is then fertile for exploitation, oppression and ultimate annihilation through trepidation. "With the truth hidden, there will be little expression of thought to the contrary."²⁶

Essentially, Woodson argued that the Black man can show pride in his past by a scientific approach to the study of and sharing of his own history to the world. Much of what others have written about his history, Woodson maintained, "during the last three centuries has been mainly for the purpose of bringing him where he is today and holding him there."²⁷

Woodson's argument is well-founded, and quite poignant; however, some salutary changes have taken place in modern American education. Those changes have come but not fast enough. Jones and Maloy maintained:

. . . Although American historians have expanded their coverage of Black history, as well as contributions by women, families and laborers, most teacher preparation programs still ignore Asian, African, and Hispanic cultures and their relevance for children of today's world.²⁸

Certainly, teacher preparation and teacher rejuvenation are viable components of the educational process for students of all ethnic groups. While it is the belief of this researcher that teachers should be held in high regard with deep respect, many teachers would do well to descend from their "ivory tower." It certainly is possible to exemplify humility and simultaneously exhibit true professionalism.

According to Woodson, the servant of the people is different from the leader in that he is not elevated above the people, seeking what is advantageous to himself.²⁹ This fourth workshop, as all the others, was--naturally--presented to teachers. From a broad perspective, teachers are seen as and classified by many as "public servants." The following description might therefore be considered noteworthy:

. . . The servant of the people is sown among them, living as they live, doing what they do and enjoying what they enjoy. He may be a little better informed than some other members of the group; it may be that he has had some experience that they have not had, but in spite of this advantage he should have more humility than those whom he serves, for we are told that "Whosoever is greatest among you, let him be your servant."³⁰

With the above-mentioned basic concepts in mind, the fifth and final workshop entitled: **Developing the English Department Resource Area** was held. As stated in chapter four of this dissertation, the teachers found the material interesting and made helpful suggestions. An outcome of that workshop is that some teachers have

contributed material to the resource area, a progressive project. It is progressive because it is still developing (however slowly) despite the very difficult and adverse school climate.

The English Department Resource Area has great potential as a staff development tool; notwithstanding, efforts toward its effectiveness have been somewhat thwarted by administrative decisions and changes. In spite of many obstacles and low morale, most of the English and reading teachers have stood firm in their commitment to excellence. Though small in number, these teachers work together and tend to set the trend for the rest of the faculty.

As stated in the Methodology and Procedure section of chapter one of this dissertation, entitled "Overview," (p. 10), the concept of the resource area was emphasized more than the actual physical location. Collaborative school improvement activities can foster settings in which educators have high self-esteem, feel competent and motivated to encounter new challenges and embrace opportunities for reflection on the bureaucratic and professional dilemmas.³¹ In working together, their daily strategies for coping become clearer, they obtain more support from others and are less apprehensive about attempting new managerial and instructional approaches.³² "Then teachers will collectively share responsibilities, make decisions, initiate changes, and welcome new partners in school improvement."³³

Down "in the trenches," high school teachers are in a good position to share their experiences and views with college professors and new teachers as well. Kunjufu advised college education departments to offer future graduates a curriculum dealing

with a "problem solving" approach as opposed to one dealing with "banking." These college education departments need to be less conservative and resistant to change. Citing the testimonies of many teachers, Kunjufu maintained that these colleges are not equipping teachers to deal with the complex problems indigenous to the inner city and its youth.³⁵

Teachers do not teach children how to think because they don't know how. We should move away from the certainly principle and begin asking open-ended questions. I believe a major reason for teacher burnout, beyond parent apathy and poor administrative leadership, is static ideas from the linear model, in contrast to dynamic ideal from the circular model. I believe teachers, parents, and students know an awful lot about schools, but are seldom considered by administrators in curriculum design. While teachers are willing to strike over income, seldom will they organize to make the curriculum more relevant. Lastly, I believe hyperactivity comes in part from boredom; a more involved curriculum may reduce some of those discipline problems.³⁶

At this point, it might be noted that some members of the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School faculty came together for part of two consecutive summers (1992 and 1993) to make the English/language arts curriculum more relevant, preparing alignment guides for the senior and junior high classes respectively. It should also be noted that the researcher for this dissertation was privileged to be the coordinator for both of these committees. To a certain extent, the collaboration of teachers in the rewriting of the English/language arts curriculum was an outgrowth and outcome of the final workshop in this project.

Essentially, Kunjufu, in his chapter entitled "A Relevant Curriculum," attempted

. . . to challenge schools to provide our children with a curriculum that will educate them by motivating thinking skills. Second, to better understand the learning styles of Black children to enhance the provision the appropriate pedagogy or teaching style. Third, to realize that, if children are neither expected to do well nor given images of academic success, particularly in math and science, it will have a detrimental effect [correction mine] on self-esteem. Fourth, to point out that African-American children bring a higher verve to the classroom that is being labeled [correction mine] hyperactive rather than being considered a challenge to a curriculum that may be irrelevant, thereby perpetuating boredom and defeating our objective of self-discipline. Lastly, to look at some recommended curriculum models.³⁷

In an attempt to retain the use of the Words Are Important series (a set of vocabulary booklets) as an adjunct to the new whole language curriculum, in a "dynamic" rather than "linear" way, the researcher composed and presented writings which she dubbed "paragraphs of relevance." A sequential vocabulary study from grades seven through twelve, the Words Are Important series were subject to be excluded from the new curriculum. In order to salvage their use, this researcher managed to retain them by making them more "relevant." Each paragraph was introduced along with each new vocabulary lesson comprising a set of ten words. These paragraphs, utilizing the vocabulary for the current lesson were composed and first used during the 1992-1993 school year (after the senior high curriculum had been revised during the summer of 1992).

These paragraphs are the result of the effort made to refrain from teaching words in isolation, a practice discouraged by modern pedagogy and the New York State Education Department as well. Instead, teachers are strongly encouraged to help students to "make sense of" and find personal meaning for material imparted to them. Serving a multipurpose, these paragraphs were positive, upbeat and hopefully motivational while at the same time, personal, relevant and instructional. A careful scrutiny of each paragraph will evidence a close correlation with situations, problems and events which occur during any given school year.

On this subject, the researcher conducted a staff development workshop or seminar in November, 1992 in which she explained and presented these materials to teachers for their perusal. As demonstrated in that session, teachers can tap their creative powers and produce relevant material which can be incorporated into their lessons to possibly spark student interest and increase motivation.

While this doctoral project has been quite productive, it does not purport to have implemented major changes, resulting in significant increases in test scores and academic improvement. In the section entitled "A Note on Methodology" from the chapter, "The Promise of School Partnerships," Jones and Maloy warned of certain pitfalls in school improvement projects. Both outside observers and participants in school change often exaggerate the expected results for school improvement.³⁸

Although every reformer would like gains in student esteem and satisfaction with school, as well as academic achievement, few interventions are large enough relative to the forces affecting schools to show statistically significant gains over five to ten years. Specific projects with narrow goals such as reduction tardiness or raising scores on a fifth-grade writing test often produce solid

gains but typically ignore other areas where new problems may arise.³⁹

Contending that a change in school cultures is necessary for any significant improvement, Jones and Maloy cited Purkey and Smith who admonished that reformers must first change people's behaviors and attitudes in order to change schools.⁴⁰ The main focus of any school improvement strategy should be a consensus among members of the school staff on important issues more so than overt control.⁴¹

Jones and Maloy maintained that

. . . the literature on collaboration--in combination with studies of effective schools--has suggested how changes have taken hold in those schools where leadership and support have led to adoption and adaptation of a curriculum that emphasizes learning, regular monitoring, an orderly environment, and high expectations for students and staff.⁴²

From the work of "Ronald Edmonds, Carol Gilligan, Robert Kegan, Ann Lieberman and Lynn Miller, Michael Lipsky, Ian Mitroff, Seymour Sarason, Alfred Schutz, and Karl Weick, "Jones and Maloy learned much:

. . . Their insights were confirmed and enriched by the work of literally hundreds of teachers and students who have contributed their efforts and thoughts to collaborative endeavors. Researchers, teachers and students illustrate that the key to school improvement rests in establishing and maintaining a spirit of purposeful change based on the strength and realities present in public schools today.⁴³

Accordingly, Jones and Maloy agreed on the propositions that American public schools were similar to closed systems or cultures that were self-perpetuating and that will become increasingly less functional in the future.⁴⁴ Obviously, school

improvement “must involve sustained efforts by educators to involve new resources and to introduce different behaviors into school settings.”⁴⁵

As one means of boosting teacher morale and fostering greater collaboration, various organizations, especially school boards would do well to value the expertise and resources offered by teachers. It is suggested that outstanding teachers be enlisted as expert advisers by civic organizations, museums, libraries, public agencies, and the media. Their expertise should also be utilized by parent groups that are re-creating useful programs.

Extending beyond the classroom setting, teachers are community assets and should be invited to participate in various nonschool affairs, applying their valuable knowledge and skills. A possible consequence might be “the additional status, income, community appreciation, and personal gratification that are scarce commodities in the lives of many teachers.”⁴⁶

Another recommendation is that all history and literature teachers be provided with ample opportunities to stay abreast of innovations in their subjects perhaps through summer courses and workshops conducted by scholars in the field. They should have ready access to appropriate professional meetings, conferences and journals, along “with sabbaticals and other recurrent opportunities to read, reflect, and do research in their professional disciplines.”⁴⁷

Teachers need to get their batteries recharged from time to time; they need professional renewal and collegial relationships; and they need to keep intellectually keen. As with any professionals, much of this is their own responsibility and that of their peers and professional associations. But those in charge of schools and

education policy must also be mindful of these needs and make proper efforts to accommodate them.⁴⁸

Ravitch and Finn, in What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?, recommended that history and English teachers “collaborate to select documents, oration, inaugural addresses, journals, essays, and other nonfiction that have both literary merit and historical significance.”⁴⁹ Also recommended was the opportunity for new teachers to observe mentor teachers, familiarize themselves with the weaknesses and strengths of instructional materials, and manage a classroom of active students. Of equal importance is the selection of well-educated supervisors and principals with the ability and willingness to assist new teachers.⁵⁰

Another suggestion by Ravitch and Finn was that teachers of literature and history not only participate in the selection of textbooks and other instructional materials, but also collaborate in establishing curricula for their subjects from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This will probably result in a

carefully sequenced and developmentally sound preparation in history and literature. Wherever possible, history teachers should enrich their courses with literature, and literature teachers should enrich their courses with history.⁵¹

A major outcome of the workshop was that, as previously stated, the teachers (English, social studies, and reading) collaborated on the new English/language arts alignment guides for grades seven through twelve.

What was accomplished within the English/language arts department can be duplicated in other departments within the school. In fact, other subject teachers have expressed strong interest in seeing such a project duplicated on a school-wide basis.

Once the English Department Resource Area has achieved a greater level of development, such a plan will probably be launched.

A long range goal is to share and disseminate information regarding this project so that it might be implemented in other areas and settings. It is further recommended that colleges and universities expand their contacts with schools by developing collaborative projects of various kinds--summer institutes, research seminars, "textbook review projects, and curriculum-development activities."⁵²

Many professors enjoy deriding their students' abysmal ignorance of history and literature, but few of them have been willing to work collaboratively with school-teachers in their fields or even to interest themselves in the challenges of teaching their subject to young children and adolescents . . . Ignoring John Donne's famous admonition, professors of history and literature have acted as if higher education were an island, detached from the problems of the schools. The cultural ignorance of which professors endlessly complain may in part be attributed to negligence on campuses where teachers failed to receive a solid liberal education.⁵³

Ravitch and Finn cited an outstanding high school English teacher, Patrick Welsh, who served on the learning area committee for the nationwide literature assessment and had this to say as he dubbed American students as "lookworms"--not book-worms:

When I asked some of these kids what they'd do if they were assigned three hours of homework a night, many replied that they'd refuse to do it. "If you mess with people's TV, they'd quit school. I can't read your books because I've got my programs to watch." says one delightful girl who's yet to finish more than 20 pages of any novel I've assigned this year. These same kids can rattle off every character and detail in the soap operas and sitcoms but have little knowledge of our common cultural heritage. Recently, when a class was

studying "Hamlet, " many of the students thought that Shakespeare was born before Jesus; not one member of the same class knew who Cain and Abel were.⁵⁴

Another important recommendation is that public and private agencies such as museums, universities, historical societies, libraries, and other organizations with educational programs, recognize their responsibility to enhance the public's knowledge of literature and history " and should design their exhibitions, with the assistance of teachers and scholars, not merely as displays but as educational experiences."⁵⁵ Because a significant part of their potential audience often knows very little or nothing at all about the subject of exhibition, they "should make the general education of the public a high priority."⁵⁶

Fortunately, the first alignment committee, while working on the curriculum guide (during the summer of 1992), was able to have a session with the staff of the Roosevelt Public Library. At that time, the new library was under construction (with modern technological facilities), There was a very productive interchange of ideas, with that staff laying the groundwork for further suggestions and implementation of ideas. Before the meeting ended, the committee submitted the newly revised suggested reading list to the staff, with a plan for them to receive the new alignment guide once it was printed.

In a spirit of collaboration from a more local perspective, this researcher and colleagues have established a good rapport with the library staff of the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School. This staff is and always has been amenable to many suggestions for ordering useful audio-visual materials as well as recommended

literature. In fact, they have copies of the new alignment guides for the junior and senior high, along with copies of assignment sheets and schedules for major projects assigned to students. Most importantly, the resource area is housed in the teachers' section of the school library.

It is also incumbent upon public libraries to foster knowledge and literacy. They can no longer function solely as a repository of information, but they must also "join hands with the schools and agencies of adult education to attract new audiences and to develop new programs that educate the public."⁵⁷ They may need to expand their services beyond the routine activities such as story hours for small children to include basic reading programs, book-and -author programs for students, and book clubs for teenagers.⁵⁸

In order to salvage the so-called "at risk" student and improve the basic fundamental knowledge of all students, schools in other settings would do well to strive for curriculum relevancy. Some superintendents have voiced their awareness of the fallacies in their curriculum and have acknowledged its Eurocentricism; however, they balk at textbook replacement because of financial constraints.⁶⁰ Kunjufu sees this as a "cop out" or evasive response to the problem. He counters that it is ludicrous for him "to accept the reason why Columbus discovered America is because of limited resource" ⁶¹ Viable alternative were presented. Handouts can be photocopied and errors in textbooks can be pointed out by teachers. The truth is that "White-controlled publishing companies have a lot of clout." Kunjufu poignantly lamented the fact that many inner city school districts have a 40-50% drop out rate, "but Random

House, Doubleday, Ginn, Scott Foresman and other corporations continue to receive large contracts.”⁶⁴

In fact, superintendents have told Kunjufu that with the plethora of problems they must address--”lack of funding, organization, teacher accountability, school strikes, and teacher unions’ power--curriculum has not been a major issue on their agenda”⁶⁵ This problem needs to be scrutinized and dealt with, for too many young people are being lost “because the curriculum is irrelevant to their needs and culture.”⁶⁶

When administrators and teachers make excuses for maintaining the status quo, one problem might be a spiritual one. Peck emphasized that spiritual growth is difficult and effortful because it militates against natural resistance. People tend to acquiesce to the inclination to leave things as they are.⁶⁷

. . . Each of us has his or her own urge to grow, and each of us, in exercising the urge, must single-handedly fight against his or her own resistance . . . As we evolve as individuals, so do we cause our society to evolve. The culture that nurtures us in childhood is nurtured by our leadership in adulthood. Those who achieve growth not only enjoy the fruits of growth but give the same fruits to the world. Evolving as individuals, we carry humanity on our backs. And so humanity evolves.⁶⁸

Peck made an interesting and enlightening point. He maintained that the main impediment to growth, is laziness. Although some people are less lazy than others, everyone is lazy to some extent. Despite one’s energy, ambition or wisdom, an internal scrutiny will reveal some degree of laziness. This internal force of entropy stifles and impedes spiritual evolution.⁶⁹

It is a truism that a problem must first be acknowledged before it can be solved. This dissertation has dealt with the acknowledgment of a glaring problem and has offered some suggestions toward its solution. Recent scholarship and massive changes in the populations of many American schools have awakened modern scholars and educators to the necessity of teaching other traditions besides those of Western literature. In fact, as Michael Thelwell contended in his "Black Studies" essay, it is incumbent upon intellectually responsible people to reexamine and rehabilitate African and American political history and cultural heritage.⁷⁰

There is the rich legacy of African-American, Native-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic literature that has for far too long gone unexplored in school. There is new and old literature written by women. There is an increasingly diverse range of contemporary fiction and non-fiction--some of the best of it directed specifically to adolescents. There is, in short a whole new world of literature that our teaching cannot ignore.⁷¹

In the "Professional Notebook" of the teacher's edition of Literature and Language (the new series chosen and currently used by the teachers and students at the Roosevelt Junior-Senior High School), this researcher was pleasantly surprised to stumble upon a quote from E.D. Hirsch Jr.'s Cultural Literacy, which advocated the need for cultural literacy as opposed to solely achieving "economic fairness and high productivity." This "World Knowledge"

lies above the everyday levels of knowledge that everyone possesses and below the expert level known only to specialists. It is that middle ground of cultural knowledge possessed by the "common reader." It includes information that we have traditionally expected our children to receive in school, but which they no longer do.⁷²

Perhaps if parents, educators, and other influential forces in society, collaborate to reverse this trend by implementing “a curriculum of love” espoused by Gentry and Peelle, academic success might be achieved and an enhanced basic “world knowledge” accompanied by increased test scores among American youth nationwide might be the result.⁷³

Notes

¹E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Culture Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987), p. 11.

²Ibid.

³Benjamin S. Bloom, Human Characteristics and School Learning (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), p. 28.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Diane Ravitch and Chester Finn, What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature (New York: Harper & Rowe, 1988), pp. 251 & 252.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹E.D. Hirsch, pp. 110 & 111.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p. 156.

¹²Bloom, p. 156.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 156 & 157.

¹⁵Carter G. Woodson, The Mis-Education of the Negro (Hampton VA: U.B. & U.S. Communications Systems, 1992), p. 154.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 156.

²³Ibid., pp. 191 & 192.

²⁴Ibid., p. 192.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 193.

²⁷Ibid., p. 194.

²⁸Byrd L. Jones and Robert W. Maloy, Partnerships for Improving Schools (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 159.

²⁹Woodson, p. 131.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Jones and Maloy, p. 109.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Jawanza Kunjufu, Developing Positive Self Images in Black Children (Chicago: African-American Images, 1984), p. 37.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 37 & 38.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 41 & 42.

³⁸Jones and Maloy, p. 16.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid., p. 17.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ravitch and Finn, p. 230.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 221.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 228.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 229.

⁵²Ibid., p. 234.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 238.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 242.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Jawanza Kunjufu, Critical Issues in Educating African-American Youth: A Talk With Jawanza (Chicago: African American Images, 1989), p. 34.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 266.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 267.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 273.

⁷⁰Michael Thelwell, Duties, Pleasures, and Conflicts: Essays in Struggle (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), p. 135.

⁷¹Goheen, Richard Craig, Literature and Language [Grade 12- Teacher's Edition] (New York: McDougal, Littell, 1992), p. 27.

⁷²Ibid., James Marshall, Senior Consultant, p. T17.

⁷³Atron Gentry with Carolyn C. Peele, Learning to Survive/Black Youth Look for Education and Hope (Westport. CT: Auburn House, 1994), p. 162.

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