The effects of education on Black children: the need for education from a Black perspective

Daphne Dianne Thomas
Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations

Recommended Citation
"THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATION ON BLACK CHILDREN"

THE NEED FOR EDUCATION FROM
A BLACK PERSPECTIVE

DAPHNE DIANNE THOMAS

MAY 1, 1973

\[ T = 20 \]
THE EFFECT OF EDUCATION ON BLACK CHILDREN

I. Introduction
   A. The need for education from a Black perspective

II. Historical Background
   A. Education in Africa
   B. Education of the slave
   C. The role of the church in education
   D. Educational efforts prior to the Civil War
      1. Separation of the races
   E. Educational efforts since the Civil War

III. Educational Policies and the Implications for Blacks
   A. Title I, Educational and Secondary Act
   B. Title IV of the Civil Rights Act
   C. "Culture Deprivation"

IV. The Public School System
   A. The administration of local public school systems
      1. The composition of the school board
      2. The role of the superintendent
      3. Curriculum
      4. Language in the classroom

V. The Role of the Black Family in Education
   A. Education as a strength in the Black family
   B. Families in crisis
1. The effect of Alcoholism on the family
2. The role of the School Social Worker during family crisis

VI. Alternative Educational Systems
A. The Community School
   1. Rational for the Community School
B. Evaluating the Community School
   1. Objectives
   2. Time frame
   3. Expected Change
   4. Pre-Test
      a. questionair
      b. other sources of information
      c. questions raised
   5. Effort
   6. Impact
   7. Efficiency
   8. Performance
   9. Pre-test, post-test, control group design

VII. Conclusion
Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the history of traditional education in the United States, and to further examine its effect on Black children. An alternative institution, "The Community School", will be presented and evaluated to determine its potential for strengthening the solidarity of the Black community.

Historically the role of education has been two fold: First it is to prepare individuals for successful survival in their social environment through the teaching of socially-useful skills, and the normative structure of social process (i.e. values and morals) in social relations for both institutional and individual interaction; secondly, to allow the individual to expand his constructive creativity.

Education therefore, provides both a "tooling" and socializing function. Education is that process of interpretation, definition, and indoctrination of learning sources. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are not education per se, but are means to an education. This is than saying to the Black community that the only valid recognition of of experience is that of traditional western society. Present educational systems are denying the legitimacy of the cultural expression of Black people. Lerone Bennette expressed this point, "In white -orientated schools, we are educated away from our rhythm, away from our genius, away from our soul. We must abandon the frame of reference of our oppressor."
Educational institutions command the potential for not only the conveyance of factual information, but also the means for introducing to a people a social value, certain political ideology, and a specific culture character. However, in order for Black educational institutions to become viable components of the Black experience, these institutions must operate from a Black perspective. Education can then become the bases on which a Black solidarity rest. By educationing the Black community to the uniqueness of the history, culture, and heritage, of Black people it becomes better equipped to formulate a political consciousness which will contribute greatly to the strengthening of the solidarity of Black people.

Many Africans who were brought to English colonies in 1619 were residents of West Africa, a culture which maintained a brilliant educational system long before salvery. In the streets of Timbuktu, scholars mingled with Black merchants, and young boys sat in the shade reciting the Koran. Youths from across the Moslem world came to Timbuktu to study law and surgery at the University of Sankore.\footnote{Lerone Bennett, Jr. Before the Mayflower (Chicago, Ill.: Johnson Publishing Co., 1962), p. 19.}

Early support of Black education in the United States was usually manifested in slave masters who desired to increase the economic efficiency of their labor force, and missionaries who taught slaves English so they might learn the principles of Christian religion. The general education of slaves was left up to the colonies, the mother country permitting them to do as they chose. The New England colonies had no laws against teaching slaves to read and write. But in New England, as elsewhere, religion was the mainspring behind the movement to give book learning to Blacks.

Despite legal restriction and contentions on the part of Southerners like John Calhoun that Blacks could not absorb educational experiences, Blacks were receiving education in various parts of the South. Laws against the teaching of Blacks were generally disregarded. The case of Fredrick Douglas having been taught by his mistress is perhaps the best known instance of an owner teaching slaves. In some cases where masters were opposed to slaves being educated, their children would teach slaves to read and write.

The instruction of one or two slaves, though a violation of the law was not regarded as serious, but the mass education of slaves was
a serious violation. This was however undertaken with consideration given to the dissemination of information concerning the schools. Black schools were known to exist in Savannah, Georgia; Charleston, South Carolina; Fayetteville, New Bern, and Raleigh, North Carolina.\(^2\)

The church played a vital role in the education of Blacks, though camouflaged with purpose of instructing Blacks in the Christian religion, it perpetuated in many cases the teaching of reading and writing. The Church of England which founded the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was instrumental in teaching reading, and catechism to Blacks and Indian children. The Quakers made some effort to give religious education to Blacks.

The Civil War theoretically removed legal prohibition against the education of Blacks, and freed 4,000,000 persons. There was a general sentiments in the North in favor of giving Blacks the rudiments of an education and throughout the South provisions were made through the Freedmen's Bureau. The Bureau during this period established 4,239 schools. When the Freedmen's Bureau went out of existence many of its schools continued to exist under the control of religious organization.

Many opposed the education of Blacks. In April 1860, Jefferson Davis declared that he was opposed to the use of tax money to put Black and white children on the same level. Davis declared that Black people had already been educated by means of regular and systematic work, language, and the religion of a civilized country.\(^3\)


Four stages mark the attitudes of the Federal government toward Blacks during the first two years of the Civil War: 1) Blacks were ignored, 2) Blacks were declared contraband, 3) The Second Confiscation Act provided that Army could receive Blacks and take them from their Masters, 4) Emancipation Proclamation and Federal Guardianship.

The Congress of July 16, 1865 passed a bill which made education an authorized function of the Bureau of Refugee, Freedmen and Abandoned. General Oliver Otis was appointed Commissioner of the Bureau and announced his intention to further Black education. Later Howard University was named in honor of this commissioner.

In North Carolina and Virginia, General Benjamin Butler encouraged the construction of school houses and school farms and laid the foundation of a labor and educational system in the area. Schools were prohibited by municipal law in Memphis. By 1865, 51 schools with 105 teachers and 7360 pupils were involved in carrying out a human educational policy.

Statistics show that, by the summer of 1865, South Carolina had 10,000 pupils, 48 schools, 76 teachers, of whom 24 were Black. Additional data includes Georgia with 3,603 pupils, 69 schools, 69 teachers of whom 43 were Black; Florida with 1,900 pupils, 30 schools, and 19 teachers.

A decade after the Civil War, the character of the educational program for Blacks had changed. This was due to the state education authorities. When they began to take over administration of school, disagreement on the question of segregation of the races and, controversy as to whether schools should be purely educational or parochial. Many Black senior institutions which later became senior colleges, were established. Lack of general public support lead to the establishment
of private funds such as the Peabody and John F. Slater Funds. Cooperation between philanthropic organization and denominational societies made possible the growth of higher education for Blacks especially in the south. 4

The establishment of education institutions were making no attempt to integrate. The Supreme Court declared in 1883 that the Fourteenth Amendment forbided states, not individuals, from discrimination. The decision of 1896 holding that separate and equal facilities for Blacks was constitutional provoked controversy for many years. In 1899, the Court ruled that Richmond County, Georgia, could operate white schools, although there were no schools for Black children. It was not until 1954 that the doctrine of "separate but equal" was declared unconstitutional, thus ending the "legality" of segregated facilities.

The Booker T. Washington, William E. B. DuBois controversy, was instrumental in the focus of Black education during the critical year of 1895-1915. Booker T. Washington was the most prominent Black in America. He refused to directly attack Jim Crow (segregation) and urged Blacks to subordinate their political, civil, and social striving and economic advancement. By implication, he accepted segregation and concentrated on a program of "industrial education." Many Washington admirers said he was not the Thomist (Uncle Tom) his critics said he was. It is true that he worked hard behind the scenes to make separate "equal" and that he sometimes condemned lynching. William DuBois published a book, The Soul of Black. In it he favored immediate social and political integration and higher education of a Tal-ented Tenth (of the Black race) who would lead the masses out of the

4Ibid., p. 146.
wilderness. In *The Souls of Black Folks*, he attacked "The Tuskegee
Machine" in an essay entitled "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others." He opposed what he viewed the narrow educational program of Washington, which was too predominately economic in its objectives.  

Between 1900 and 1930, Black teachers earned $100-400 per year, compared with $200-900 for the white teachers. Segregated schools were not providing education equal to that of white schools. It was not until the Depression that federal interest in Black education increased. The Civilian Conservation Corps, the National Youth Administration, and the Work Progress Administration helped educate many Blacks. May McLeod Bethune, who helped create Bethune-Cookman College in Florida, directed the National Youth Administrations Division of Black Affairs. More than 600,000 Black students participated in educational activities. Federal projects enabled Black artists to pursue their vocation. Well-known WPA artist included Langston Hughes, Charles Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Richard Wright.

By 1970, progress was still somewhat slow. The aim of nonsegregated education for all students in public school in the United States was far from achieved. The National Guard was continually used to control public defiance of attempts to desegregate schools. Southern states enacted 145 laws between 1954 and 1958 to protest segregation. Integration was met with sit-ins, demonstrations, and boycotts. Black parents in a number of cities sought to enroll their children in all white schools assuming that whites would be responsive to the law. White supremacy did not die that easily. In many communities troops had to protect little Black children from white mobs. In Little Rock, Arkansas, Governor Faabas sent troops to block nine students from en-

---

5 op. cit., Bennett, pp. 276-278.
ering Central High School. After the pupils entered the school, Le-
ron Bennett stated:

Segregation began a cruel campaign to drive the nine
Black children out of the school. The children were
shoved, kicked, elbowed, pushed down steps. Can o-
peners, slivers of glass, and sharpened pencils were
thrown at them. It was deadly serious school war.6

The federal government attempted to advance the cause of Black
education by initiating legislation such as Title I of the Elementary
and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and Title IV of the Civil Rights
Act of 1965, which outlawed discrimination in the use of federal funds
for educational projects. Title IV made more funds available for in-
stitutions engaged in desegregation. Another problem arose for Blacks.
Between May and September, 1965, over 660 Black teachers were displaced
for reasons relating to the integration of school faculties. By 1966
5,000 Black teachers had been affected.

Many anti-integrationists advocated that the real problem was
that Black children are "culturally deprived" and hence the best
strategy was "compensatory education," not integration. In 1964, an
assistant superintendent explained what this deprivation meant.

Many of these children have low aspiration levels,
lack those out-of-school experiences which are so
richly provided where parents are in more favora-
ble circumstances. We do not have an inferior
school system, we have been getting an inferior
type of student.7

The folklore of "cultural deprivation" have become a cruel alibi--
when in doubt blame the child, not the system. The Black psychologist

6Lerone Bennett, Confrontation: Black and White (Baltimore:

7William Ryan, Blaming the Victim (New York: Pantheon Books,
1971), p. 32.
Kenneth Clarke saw the cultural deficit model as a disguised version of an old myth:

Just as those who proposed earlier racial inferiority theories were invariably members of the dominant racial groups who represent themselves to be superior, those who at present propose the cultural deprivation are in fact members of the privileged group who inevitably associate their privilege status with their own intellect and its related success. Many of today's scholars and teachers came from 'culturally deprived' background. Many of these individuals, however, when confronted with students who present economic and social predicament is not like their own was, tend to react negatively to them, possibly to escape the painful memory of their own prior lower status.

The great majority of children in the United States attend schools that are largely segregated, that is almost all of their fellow students are of the same racial background as they are. Black children are by far the most segregated. More than 65 percent of all Black pupils in the first grade attend schools that are between 90 and 100 percent Black. The same pattern of segregation holds though not quite so strongly, for the teachers of Black and White students for the nation as a whole, the average Black elementary pupil attends a school in which 65 percent of the teachers are Black; the average White elementary pupil attends a school in which 97 percent of the teachers are white. On a nation wide basis, in cases where the race of the pupils and teachers are not matched, the trend is all in one direction: white teachers teach Black children but Black teachers seldom teach white children; just as in the school integration conflict primarily of a majority of Black pupils in predominately White schools but almost never of a few Whites in largely Black schools.

---

9op. cit., Poloski, p. 184.
Many of the deficits in educational systems stem from the manner in which its program is administered on national, state and local level. This paper will focus primarily on the school's administration on a local level.

Teachers have for quite some time sought positions on local and state school boards, but have in most cases been denied their professional input. American school boards are generally composed of white-middle class men which is an indecision of the type of administration that controls our schools. Dan Lortic points out that "no one ever died a split infinitive" reflecting the popular view that the teachers's knowledge, unlike that of doctors, is something less vital in that almost every school board member (and every tax payer) has been to public school, and most feel themselves competent to decide matters of education. This outlook dates back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when little more than bare literacy was expected of elementary school teachers.

This tradition has resulted in a superintendent of schools having no policy making powers of his own. Policy is set by the school board, whose authority and responsibility is usually set forth in the state law. The superintendent is the chief executive officer of the board, charged with implementing its policies; while recommending different policies to board, he is expected to avoid substantive disagreement. Since the demarcation between policy and its implementation is not always sharp and clear. A strong or politically sophisticated superintendent frequently makes policy through the exercise of his administrative discretion; he may also influence the board's policy decisions through force of personality or by shaping the agenda for board meetings. But the usual situation for superintendents is
one of tenuous rather than assured possession of position.

The status of the school superintendent is revolved around non-educational matters. Superintendents are dealing with new school buildings, the budget, and salaries of teachers. By concentrating on these issues and devoting their energies to winning the necessary support of board members, some superintendents have left out of account other and deeper social issues that would affect their pupils more profoundly.

Black people generally occupy a very limited number of the positions on school boards. Very few hold positions as superintendent or supervisor, thus resulting in a neglect of Black schools and the Black child's needs. This is quite evident in the curriculum that are administered in most public schools.

Generally, there is a denial of the legitimacy of cultural expression among Black children in public schools. There is little in any curriculum which starts with Black as a specially and uniquely cultured people. Curriculums have been designed to perpetuate the existing system, to prepare Black children for entry into white society.

Many Blacks are advocating Black studies throughout the educational systems of this country in an attempt to make curriculums more relevant to the needs of Black people.

The attitude of a teacher plays a significant role in the educational development of a child. Black children have for many years been victimized in that their teachers do not expect them to learn. This is certainly one possible interpretation of the fact that ghetto children in Harlem decline in relative performance and in IQ the longer they are in school. One guidance counselor said: "The children have a poor self-image and unrealistic aspirations. If you ask them what
they want to be, they will say a doctor or something like that."

When asked, "What would you say to a child who wanted to be a doctor," she replied, "I would present the situation to him as it really is, show him how little possibility he has for that. I would tell him about the related fields, technicians, etc. This type of guidance reinforced by poor teaching and academic retardation, that poor motivation and absence of a dignified self-image stem from negative influence of teachers much more than from the influence of the home and community. ¹⁰

Another problem Black children must deal with in educational settings is their supposedly "language deficit." In classrooms in Florida, White school teachers in a rural area said, "they could not understand their Black children, who seemed to speak a different language from the English spoken by White children."¹¹ This phenomenon, explained by Black children when taught by White teachers get lower grades than Whites on scholastic and verbal intelligence measures, in that if a teacher cannot understand a child, he is limited in his ability to evaluate the child. A Black child may hear the same instruction as a White, and understand them clearly; however, the manner in which he responds to the teacher determines his ability to understand (by their standards).

Unless firm and immediate steps are taken to reverse the present trend, the public school system of this country will become the pitfall of Black children. It has the potential to develop Black minds

¹⁰op. cit., Clark, pp. 132-133.

and to transmitting a vibrant Black culture, but it must first be revamped, and giving the needs of Black children much consideration.

To ask any Black parent what he wishes most for his child is to receive a response "a decent and effective education." The system of education has failed miserably to meet the needs of Black children. The reformation of the educational system should be designed to make the white establishment more sensitive to Black children and to engage in extraordinary efforts to include Black people in these systems at all levels. At the same time, the Black strategies should be designed to enhance the control of Black communities over the educational institutions which operate in them.  

Some of the educational reforms now underway seem to hold high promise for strengthening the fabric of Black family. The Black family has been and still is the cornerstone of the Black community. The family teaches what is expected of people and what they can expect in life. The family also imparts the values that shape a person's belief, abilities, and actions. The Black family fulfills several obvious functions in caring for the child. This paper will focus on the family's intellectual development of the child. In traditional African society the family was the base of educational exposure. The mother, grandmother, aunts and cousins were all involved in orienting the child to what is meant to be an African. This is one of the basic and most fundamental strengths of the Black family. The Black family has a very high achievement orientation. Robert Hill, in his book *Strengths of the Black Families*, speaks to this subject:

Recent census data on educational attainment provide additional support on the educational achievement of Black youth from low status families. According to the October, 1970 Current Population Survey, three-fourths of all the Blacks enrolled in college came from homes in which the family head had no college.¹³

The Black family then occupies a complex and important role in preparing Black children for school and for life itself. The educational responsibility for a Black child is critical, continuous, and demanding. The school can and must play an important part in this responsibility, but life in a family setting begins long before the school experience is introduced.

The family will face many crises throughout the educational years of its children. The effective handling of these crises depends to a large extent on the family's ability to acquire help. This paper will attempt to examine the frequently occurring crisis of alcoholism and its effect on children.

Alcoholism has been called "the family disease" for every member in such a family is affected by it, emotionally, spiritually and, in most cases, economically, socially, and often physically. The steady sense of security, love and warmth necessary for adequate development of children are so unpredictably present during this time that the child has difficulty developing the trust and confidence in himself and others which he will need in order to successfully adjust in both school and the broader community.

The alcoholic, when in the active phase of his illness is a most disturbed and disturbing individual. In the early stage, when some measure of control still exists, he may be able to abstain during

working hours or during an emergency, so that his alcoholism can be kept secret from all but the members of his family.

Many of the normally shared activities of family life are denied the child of the alcoholic. The child needs his parents or guardians to teach him the rules of his culture. The child may sometimes blame himself for the quarrels between parents or even the drinking episode, assuming that some shortcoming of his own triggered it off.¹⁴

To help the children of an alcoholic means generally treating the entire family, for the ultimate recovery may depend on their patience and understanding of alcoholism as a disease. The alcoholic is usually too deeply involved in his alcoholism to seek help for himself.

In terms of the school's role in helping the child and his family through crises of this type, the school social worker, when made aware of the situation by the child, a parent, neighbor, or other students, may intervene.

Research shows that a casework orientation dominates the school social field. In various studies, school social workers have revealed that the emotional problems and personal adjustment of the individual child to the school are their primary concerns. They spend most of their time practicing individual casework, conferring with teachers about the individual child, and communicating with community agencies.¹⁵


The School Social Worker's busy schedule keeps him preoccupied with the problems of individual children and restricts his work contacts to individual teachers, parents and students. He rarely has an opportunity to meet with his professional colleagues to discuss common problems and proposals for innovation in the school.

If the school social worker wishes to initiate change that will provide a healthier environment for the school child, he cannot function exclusively within the confines of the school. Besides arranging patterns for effective communication within the school, he must be in touch with people outside. The school's problems are inextricably bound up with the problems of the community. One of the most common myths about American education is that schools proceed best when there is little or no traffic with the outside world.16

Black people, in the late 1960s began to again evaluate the educational system of this nation, and were again very displeased. These institutions were still very irrelevant, and Blacks were occupying very few positions of control. A new approach to urban Black education was born, the demand for "community control" was heard around the country. Since you cannot deliver effective integrated education, one parent said to the Board, we choose:

A segregated school that will deliver quality education, the kind that will assure our children the opportunity to advance in the world. The only way we can see of achieving this goal is for the parents and community to have a real role in selection of staff determination of programs, and evaluation of the education in school.17

Black people were now demanding a new relationship to school systems.


Developing a sense of community and activating the educative community are important preludes to the community education process. In this process we think of the community as belonging to all the people who reside there. The people, their problems, and the total community resources become central to all educational programs. The community's school serves as centers for education; their programs are directed toward improving the entire community.

A philosophy that accompanies the community education process is that learning is continuous and a lifelong experience. This implies a process that begins in the home at birth, is continued in the community school, and is perpetuated in the community throughout one's life.

The community school concept is often used synonymously with several terms: "the open door policy," the "lighted school house," and "the neighborhood school." The neighborhood school or community school is simply a school within easy access of local residents; access meaning a close proximity to where people live, a school open most hours of the year, and educational programs designed for and in cooperation with the residents.

Administering community schools is not the same as administering traditional schools. Many of the management principles are the same, but the community school administrator, director, or teachers must develop a sixth sense about the community in which the school exists.

In evaluating a community school, one would first examine the objectives of the school, what it is that the school plans to do. In the community school, the overall objective is to:

Incorporate the community into the structuring, planning, implementation and full participation
in the educational program of the school. \(^\text{18}\)

The objectives tell for whom the community school is designed, the total community, parents, children, businessmen, and senior citizens of the community. The time frame — community schools are generally federally funded such that the time frame would be determined by the amount of funds and the designated time for operation. The expected changes on the community school is the evolution of community school of the educational institution which serves them.

A pre-test will be administered to determine the community's feeling concerning the community school. A questionnaire will be administered to the immediate community, questioning their feeling on the need for a community, and their willingness or unwillingness to support it. A contact will be made with the local school board to determine the grade level, ages, number of teachers, textbooks and equipment presently in the school. The Census Bureau will be contacted to determine the number of persons in the community, with a breakdown of ages. The Better Business Bureau to determine the number and kind of businesses in the area.

Various questions will be raised as to the amount of community participation on the various administrative committees, the degree to which students are involved in the operation of the school, and who will determine the type of adult education classes offered at the school.

Various categories of evaluation will be established, including effort, performance and efficiency and impact.

The effort evaluation will demonstrate the number of students, parents, and community persons involved in the community school; perform-

\[^{18}\text{Roger Hiemstra, The Educative Community: Linking the Community, School and Family (Nebraska: Professional Educator Publication, 1972), p. 33.}\]
ance will indicate the degree to which the community school is incor-
porating the community is the school. Impact will measure the ef-
fect the community school has had on the total community, efficiency
will measure the use of the community school, could community schools
exist with less funding.

The pre-test, post-test control group design will be used to
evaluate the community school. Two groups will be involved in this
evaluation: 1) the neighborhood that is to participate in the com-
munity school, and 2) a neighborhood (across town) that is not to
participate in the community school (the control group). An attempt
will be made to match the economical, educational, and social levels
of the two groups. Also, the number of children, businessmen, senior
citizens, and businesses. The group to participate in the community
school (experimental group) will be exposed to the community school,
with the other group, the control group will not. This will take
place prior to the participation in the program. At the conclusion
of the school term, an "after" measure will be made, and will be com-
pared with the "before" measure with both groups to indicate the
changes produced by the community program. The effectiveness of the
community school will be indicated by the difference between the re-
sponses of the experimental group and the control group.
Conclusion

The community controlled school when correctly administered is one educational institutions which speaks to needs of Black People. Black people are in need of a form of education which is designed especially for their needs. Other people can no longer define our goals, or tell us what our education will be, for many of the problems that we as a people experience result from the kind of education we receive.

The community controlled school holds the key to Black Solidarity. Through the education of the Black Community to a political consciousness we can attempt to answer the questions of our identify, purpose, and direction: Who are we? Where are we going? How will we get there?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Other Sources of Information
