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Afrocentricity Research Construct

WHAT IS THIS RESEARCH CONSTRUCT?

Afrocentricity, as a research methodology, came as a way of providing an approach that "compels the researcher to challenge the use of the traditional Eurocentric research criteria of objectivity, reliability, and validity in the inquiry process" (Reviere, 2001, p. 710). The formal theory of Afrocentrism was first proposed by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante (Reviere, 2001).

Reviere work on Afrocentric research provides many critiques of non-Afrocentric literature. For example, the existing literature on African histories and cultures have been from a "one-dimensional perspective" (p. 717). This has met that "interpretations are inevitably colored by European views of the phenomena being studied" (p. 709).

As a result, stories and findings may likely have a distorted viewpoint. Research that follows Afrocentricity empowers individuals, who have lost and neglected voices, to have a say about their individual and collective experiences, in light of the Eurocentric paradigm that is often oppressive and dismissive.

Afrocentric research methodology has been used in the development of new curriculum for Black students (Reviere, 2001) and developing culturally relevant pedagogy for both home-schooled, public and private schooling for Black students (Ringstaff, 2023).
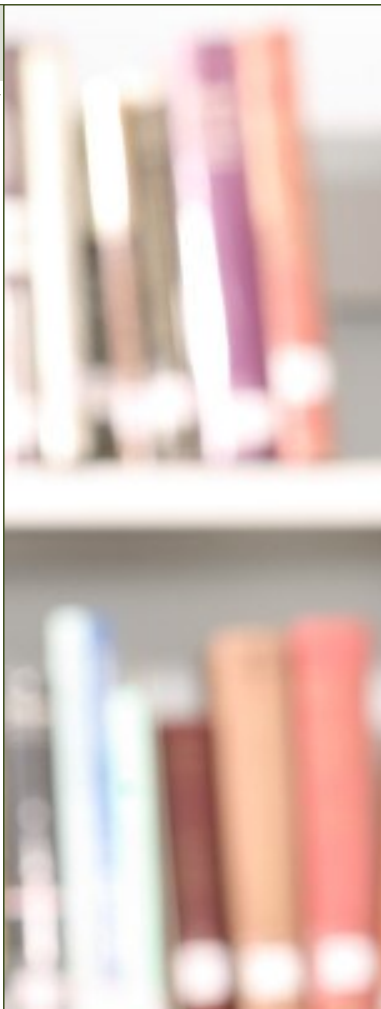
GUIDING TENANTS

According to Reviere, Asante refers to two principles that are foundational to African cultures. They include the terms "Ma'at" and "Nommo". Ma'at refers to the "quest for justice, truth, and harmony" (p. 711), whereas "[Nommo] describes the creation of knowledge as a vehicle for improvement in human relations" (p. 711).

Both Ma'at and Nommo act as guiding tenants that are central to Afrocentricity. Five additional principles or, Afrocentric canons, are based on Asante's Afrocentric tenants. They include, "[1] ukweli, [2] utulivu, [3] uhaki, [4] ujamaa, and [5] kujitoa" (p. 710).

Two principles to African cultures are 'Ma'at' and 'Nommo'

3D CUBE OF IDEOLOGY / CONCEPT MAP

Langenbach, Vaughn and Aagaard (1994) used the three-dimensional cube to scaffold the understanding of "the intersections of views of the world, data collection method, and ideology" (p. 17). The first dimension is around the 'perspective seeking' and 'truth seeking' ontology. These authors describe both constructs to be along a continuum. For those who subscribe to a perspective seeking ontology, one has understandings that there are multiple truths (Langenbach et al., 1994) to the world. There is an adoption of a subjective world. However, for those who subscribe to a truth-seeking ontology, Langenbach et al. show a singular, universal truth. Based on the Afrocentric construct, I believe its leanings are towards the perspective seeking ontology.

Secondly, Langenbach et al. also show a secondary dimension of data collection methods. This includes qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Therefore, while general numeric data from ages and grades may be relevant descriptors in a study, Afrocentricity leans on a qualitative perspective. Finally, the last dimension follows the 'status quo' ideology and the 'reform' ideology. To best describe these ideologies, I use student achievement as an example. If, success of Black students hinged on a student's mindset, behaviours, and personal choices, then it is the individual's choices that dictates success. This means the system does not need to change for students to experience success. This is an example of 'status quo' ideology. However, suppose success hinged on changing the systemic structures at play (e.g., improving inclusion, recognizing the historicity and culture of Black students and, developing non-racist or non-discriminatory practices), then one subscribes to a 'reform' ideology. It appears that Afrocentricity, as a research method in educational contexts, has its leanings on the reformist ideology.
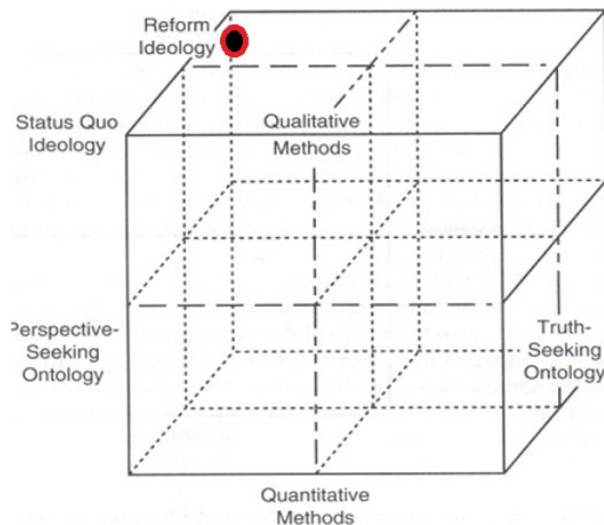
Langenbach, Vaughn and Aagaard (1994)'s cube of ideology.

AFROCENTRIC PRINCIPLES AND BELIEFS

The four axioms of methodology are connected to the five Afrocentric canons. Their description, as described by Reviere are:

Ukweli – Truth must be grounded in the experiences of the community. There is no objective, universal reality. There are multiple realities that are co-constructed by the community. "The experiences of community members are the ultimate authority in determining what is true and, therefore, are the final arbiter of the validity of research about their lives" (p. 713)

Utulivu – Refers to the concept of justice and ethics. It requires the researcher to "actively avoid creating, exaggerating, or sustaining divisions between or within communities" (p. 717). There is an active strive to promote inclusion of all groups and not create divisions.

Uhaki – This requires "a research procedure that is fair to all participants, especially to those being researched, and one whose application are mindful of the welfare of all the participants" (p. 720). As Reviere elaborates, "The Afrocentrist must strive for the encouragement and maintenance of harmonious relationships between groups" (p. 720).

Ujamaa – Both Ujamaa and Uhaki are grouped together in Reviere's work. There is a need and recognition for the "maintenance of community" (p. 719). It requires the Afrocentric researcher to "reject the researcher/participant separation" (p. 719). There is a symbiotic and mutualistic relationship between researcher, participant and the community.

Kujitoa – "Kujitoa requires that the researcher emphasize considerations of how knowledge is structured and used over the need for dispassion and objectivity" (p. 716). It is important to acknowledge the positionality of the researcher, the social and historical setting of those being researched. It is done to produce "[a] more complete and less distorted social analyses" (p. 716).

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In Reviere's manuscript, complete objectivity is an impossible ideal because one's own bias and positionality may affect the interpretations, intentions or motive for conducting the research. As a result, the objectivist stance is sidelined. Reviere's work shows that subjectivity needs to be embraced by making clear of one's ideologies, perspectives, positions and beliefs. Therefore, as Reviere says, "One has to open oneself up to critical self-examination and self-reflection both of introspection and retrospection" (p. 715).

RINGSTAFF (2023) PEER REVIEWED ARTICLE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In the introductory piece, Ringstaff (2023) highlights some of the problems related to American schools and its implementation of Afrocentricity in both the curriculum and the instructional practices. It was evident that the research showed varying degrees of local and institutional racism that pervade the education system. Curriculum and instructional practices appear to have focused on a White, Eurocentric curriculum. To note, this article appears to be derived from her doctoral dissertation completed in 2021. At that time, her last name was listed as Wells.

As a result, this paper addresses how many African-American families are now educating their own. Whether through Black schools, homeschooled or private schooling. Through such schooling practices that utilizes Afrocentricity as its guiding principles, students appear to be succeeding far better than in their traditional classroom settings. Ringstaff's focus is on the "benefits of familial relationships, a component of Afrocentricity, that leads to a village mentality in a school environment" (p. 3). She explicitly espouses the Afrocentricity research context as her guiding paradigm.

DATA COLLECTION:

Ringstaff data collection occurred during the 2019-2020 school year within a Black homeschool collective in the Midwest of the USA. Ringstaff says:

> Data collected during this period consisted of six full days of classroom observations, individual interviews with the research participants for an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the research, and an evaluation of textual artifacts, including teacher materials, such as books and content on the collective's website. (p. 5)

HOW RINGSTAFF (2023) USED AFROCENTRICITY:

Ukweli: The 'truth' was not grounded based on her reality. She spent deal of time building rapport with her participants (both students and teachers). She utilized a combination of formal, informal, structured, and semi-structured interview processes so that she could gather her data in an open and casual way. She also utilized frequent member checks to ensure that her interpretations were correct with those involved.

Utulivu: Through reading Ringstaff's work, it does not seem as if it was intended to disparage or insult Eurocentric (or White-centric) education. Ringstaff shows many examples of Utulivu. One such example is her use of challenging the contextual paradigm of the United States police officers. Ringstaff says:

> Yala presents a fair position as she challenges students to rec ognize two different perspectives, that not all police officers are 'bad' or intentionally cause harm. Yala explained, "But wait a minute ... At the end of the day, the police are to protect and serve ... There are good police officers." Yala is teaching students not to stereotype but to understand that not all police are racist despite the history of the fraternal order of the police. (p. 13)
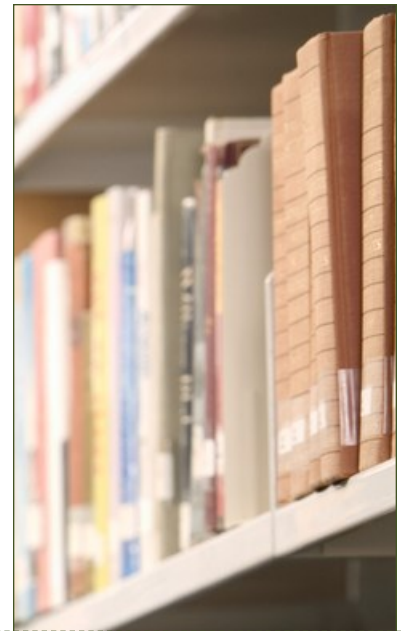
Ringstaff uses many other examples of Utulivu to promote togetherness instead of promoting a rhetoric of divisiveness.

Uhaki and Ujamaa: There is a reason why Reviere combined Uhaki and Ujamaa together in her research—they are closely knit tenants. As discussed with Ukweli, knowledge was co-constructed between all of those involved. Ujamaa removed the distinct researcher and participant roles. Togetherness was a theme that was evident throughout the paper. The partnership between all members allowed for absolute fairness, respect, genuine compassion and care to be made (Uhaki). It appeared that there were no power imbalances as all individuals were empowered to be full participants.

Kujitoa: Ringstaff (and Wells) initially positions their dissertation and paper with a critical stance highlighting the social, cultural and historical circumstances that impact Black students and their schooling. The in-depth analysis, in addition to highlighting how such structural circumstances impact Black youths was very telling. The position of the researcher is explicit. She makes her purpose known.

CONCLUSION:

Afrocentricity, as a research method, appears to remove the power imbalances that occur in some other forms of research. Knowledge and truth are co-constructed. There is a genuine respect, care and appreciation for those who are involved. Most importantly, it is one of the best ways to recover lost and neglected voices, especially in light of a Eurocentric / White-centric paradigm.
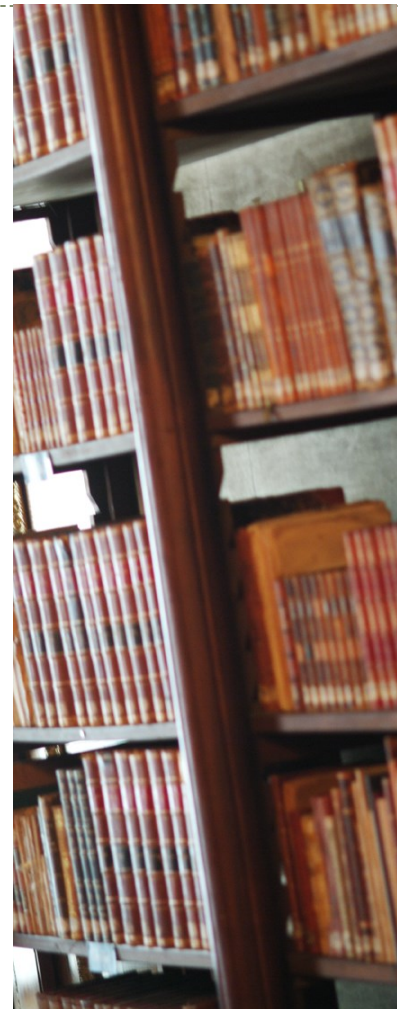
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