

**When the Language of Education is Not the Language of Culture:  
The Epistemology of Systems of Knowledge and Pedagogy**

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There is very little that is more important for any people to know than their history, culture, traditions and language; for without such knowledge, one remains naked and defenseless before the world.

–Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC)

Introduction

The central question this chapter addresses is what happens when the epistemology of systems of knowledge and pedagogy—or the language of education—is not the language of culture? Recognizing that the common problem of miseducation that African people share includes the misrepresentation of our cultural heritage and the marginalization of contemporary African realities—if they are addressed at all, it is important to search for solutions. A goal is to demonstrate a role for research in possible solutions using empirical findings from two inquiries that focus on language instruction: the implementation of national languages in Mali and a pilot research demonstration implementing web-enhanced instruction in Soṅay-senni (language) and culture designed for African American students. These investigations illustrate what can happen when the language of education is the language of culture, that is to say, when students in Africa and African Americans in the U.S. can see themselves and their realities in the learning process.

As the first Regional Director of Education in Gao, Mali ( Directeur D'Académie) for ten years (1981-1991), I supervised the development and implementation of the national indigenous language (Soṅay-senni and Tamasheq) curriculum and pedagogy in the public schools in the Gao region in Mali. (Songhoy, Songhai, Sonrai, Somrai or Songhay all refer to the Soṅay or Soṅoy people of West Africa [Mali, Niger, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Burkina Faso, ect]. Soṅay-senni or Soṅoy-senni is the language.) For the first time Malian students in this region had the opportunity to learn in their home languages in school, as a foundation for academic study rather than learning only French, the language of the colonizer, in school.

From my vantage point as an African educator, with extensive research and teaching experience in both my home country of Mali, West Africa and the United

States, I will discuss the roots of contemporary challenges in African education in the colonial system of knowledge and pedagogy. I will also discuss historical interconnections that have produced significant educational problems of miseducation that African people, including continental Africans and African Americans in the U.S. and the Diaspora, share. To explore the historical and epistemological connections underlying the miseducation of African people on the continent and in the U.S. this chapter begins with a comparison of colonial schools in West Africa in the U.S. colonies.

This chapter concludes with a brief discussion of an alternative to prevailing systems of knowledge and pedagogy, the Gao School Museum, an integrated learning-by-doing pedagogical approach that I developed in Mali that is particularly responsive to the urgent social and economic problems that educated people must be able to address ( H.Maiga, 1993, 1995).

#### What the Colonial System of Knowledge and Pedagogy Has Produced

Today, all over Africa students and parents, teachers, school administrators and staff from kindergarten to the universities are in a standstill situation, sitting around, waiting to see what will happen next. The problem they are facing is that there are no ready-made alternatives or solutions for those students who:

- Have earned a formal education degree in a predominantly non-formal market society, that is, in a “no-job” context in Africa where their degrees do not lead to employment;
- Are still attending school but who have absolutely no hope because of what is happening to the degree holders whom they are aspiring to become; or
- Have just enrolled in school but are dropping out because of the language barrier (in French-speaking countries, for example) or because of the lack of parental support due to financial constraints and/or their lack of faith in the prevailing educational systems in Africa.

Consequently, as William H. Watkins so conclusively states :

In a world of plenty, Africa starves, located on top of an ocean of oil and precious minerals, much of this continent languishes in desperate poverty and stagnation. The “cradle of civilization,” is on the precipice of catastrophic ruination. Colonialism, conquest, greed and inhumanity have arrested the development of one sixth of the human race (p. 1).

This is an accurate description of the reality that we face in Mali and throughout West Africa as education researchers in search of solutions.

Language has served as the bedrock of colonial domination and European hegemony in Africa and the United States. Today in what is called “Francophone” West Africa or French-speaking African countries like Mali, Ivory Coast and Sénégal, for example, students must master the colonial language, French, before they proceed to the study of school subject-matters and higher levels of learning. In the West, cultural annihilation that takes place in schools, as Kassie Freeman points out, contributes to an academic performance gap between Black students and white students that is viewed as mental retardation or other forms of unreadiness to learn. Clearly, for African people much of the educational experience is intended to increase one’s hate against oneself and one’s anger against one’s own family or community and much more importantly, against one’s own people as a race. European hegemony functioned initially through colonial and neocolonial educational systems of knowledge and pedagogy that overtime have instilled a very narrow, linear way of thinking that has made it impossible for generations of very capable African educators to think for themselves and to take a comprehensive, holistic approach to our common problems.

#### When the Language of Education Is Not the Language of Culture

The African continent was divided among the colonial powers of Europe at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 (Shillington, 1995, p. 305). One of the most far-reaching obstacles to be overcome in the economic and social development of post-colonial nations in Africa, and for African people everywhere, is the psychological effects of domination or the split between the mind and the body. This split produces what the celebrated Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (1981) describes in his book, Decolonising the Mind as: “nations of bodiless heads and headless bodies.” Wa Thiong’o states:

Berlin of 1884 was effected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom. In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of physical subjugation. Language was the means of spiritual subjugation. (p. 9)

However, there is no recognition in any European educational system of the need to minimize the contradiction that results from the fact that students of African ancestry are not educated in the language of their original, that is, indigenous cultures. What kind of reliable, effective education can be provided to African nations and people when all the latest developments in science, technology, health, media, business, finance and other forms of knowledge and skills of survival are stored in foreign languages? In other words, what happens when the language of education is not the language of culture?

To address these questions requires a clear understanding of history in general and the history of education in particular (Power, 1970). The significance of an historical juxtaposition of colonial occupation in English America and in Africa and the educational process that colonization implemented in both areas can be summed up with this observation made by William H. Watkins:

The mid-nineteenth century found western European nations furiously expanding their mercantile enterprises after a long period of feudalism and stagnation. By the last quarter of that century, the “scramble for Africa” and any other location for favorable profit-making ventures, was well underway. The Berlin conference, 1885-86, allowed European powers to partition Africa peacefully, although other complications soon ushered in World War II.

Juxtaposing historical contexts—colonial America and colonial Africa—is a place to begin.

#### A Comparative Historical Analysis Paradigm

The following colonial schools were established in the New England colonies of North America in the seventeenth century:

- The Dame Schools. These schools were extensions of the home’s teaching function.
- The Town Schools. The curriculum of the Town School consisted of writing and arithmetic. This form of schooling was also a continuation of the scribal tradition in education in which the school’s main purpose is to educate clerks. With the Massachusetts Act of 1647 establishing a permanent precedent in American educational law, the Town School became a Reading School. The prior goal of the Town School was to impart the three R’S of the seventeenth century: Reading,

Writing and Religion. Arithmetic was thought to be a mercantile skill and was not commonly taught except in the towns that enjoyed a commercial status.

- The Latin Grammar School. The Boston Latin Grammar School, which was the first one established in colonial New England, was first and foremost a religious institution. The Latin Grammar School's curriculum contained the usual classical subjects. This school catered to the so-called "better" classes, that is, the elite; it maintained an exclusive policy for admission; and it was a school exclusively for boys (Power, 1970, p. 549).

- The College. A year after the Latin Grammar School was established, the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony was granted an appropriation of four hundred pounds and founded the first college in English America. This school became Harvard College. Dedicated to fundamental Puritanism, Harvard's first mission was to produce future ministers. Harvard divinity students followed a curriculum resembling the ancient liberal arts: Grammar, logic, rhetoric, geometry, astronomy, ethics, metaphysics, natural sciences and sometimes some Hebrew, Greek and ancient history. Latin occupied its familiar position as a prominent subject for study and as the language of instruction.

In addition to Harvard, other colonial colleges were established, as follows:

- 1693 – The College of William and Mary
- 1701 – Yale
- 1746 – Princeton
- 1754 – Columbia
- 1755 – The University of Pennsylvania
- 1756 – Brown
- 1766 – Rutgers
- 1769 – Dartmouth (Power, 1970, page 552).

Each of these schools had a counterpart in Europe and each transplanted instructional practices originating in Europe, especially in Great Britain. Using similar a pedagogy and system of knowledge, the same colonizers (e.g., British, French, etc.) established early colonial schools in Africa. For example, in West Africa some of the schools the French colonizers created are:

- 1816            The Mutual School of St. Louis
- 1847            The School of Hostages

1857–1895 The Schools of Podor, Sedhiou, Bakel, Dakar, Longa, Rufisque, Matam, etc.

1887–1896 The School of Haut-Sénégal Niger (Mali)

1896 The School of Guinea, Ivory Coast, Dahomey

1903 The School of Faidherbe

1903 The Normal School of Saint-Louis

1903 The Professional School of Pinct-Laprade, Dakar.

In 1903 the Lieutenant Governor of Sénégal, M. C. Guy, Agrégé de l'Université (a university appointment of distinction), presented the first official report to the Council of the Colonies of West Africa. Signed by Governor General Roumain on November 24, 1903, this report regulated and organized the colonial schools in West Africa as follows:

- Primary/elementary schools
- Professional schools
- Primary Education/Commercial/Education
- Schools for Girls Education
- Normal schools for teacher training
- Schools for European staff/Indigenous staff.

After ten years of experience, the colonizers became more precise as far as the outcomes of these schools were concerned. As a result, the schools were reorganized in 1912 and the curriculum became more focused on the training of secretaries /translators, business agents, health care specialists/nurses, veterinarians, teachers/substitute teachers, specialized manpower, etc. (Moumouni, 1998, pp. 39-42, translated by H. Maiga). It is worth noting that among all the academic disciplines taught in these colonial schools, good handwriting and excellent French language mastery were thought to be the most rewarding above all subjects. This emphasis has influenced the employment situation today, including standards for promotion and social consideration as well. Indeed, mastery of French language is still a key prerequisite for school success rather than the knowledge and skills that reflect the contemporary needs in our countries. It is no wonder then that Wa Thiong'o (1981) concludes: "Learning, for a colonial child, became a cerebral activity and not an emotionally felt experience" (p. 17). In "Worldwide Conspiracy Against Black Culture and Education" (Chapter 13 of this volume) Ibrahima Seck makes this point with respect to the situation in Sénégal, another former French colony. This

comparison of the characteristics of colonial schools in Africa and the U.S. colonies suggests the following conclusions:

- The nature of the early schools established here and there is a result of similar social and political motives.
- The content areas of the respective curriculum (or curricula) in these colonial schools were an extension of the colonizers' home country education, their system of knowledge and pedagogy, their culture and even their religion.
- The knowledge and skills of the students trained in these early schools reflect the manpower needs of the colonizers.
- The educational policies implemented in these schools were consistent with the colonizers' goals of control, domination and exploitation.
- Last, but not least, the language of instruction is the language and culture of the European colonizer.

It is also important to point out that wherever a group of people dominates and imposes its own language on another group as a medium of instruction and communication, the subordinated group assimilates but with resistance. The linguistic outcome of the process of domination is never the total adoption of a language that is identical to the original language imposed. The following examples are worth noting:

- The British language produced American English in America (British colonizers versus the various national languages of European peoples);
- American English in its turn during the period of slavery produced the Gullah language and what is known today as Ebonics or African American Vernacular English (white Americans versus the various national languages of African peoples);
- The French language has produced Patois, Cajun and Creole languages (French colonizers versus African peoples in the Caribbean, Louisiana or in Africa).

#### West Africa's Contemporary Educational Crisis

As a result of this colonial past and the neo-colonial manipulations just discussed, the four most critical issues of West Africa's contemporary educational crisis are: 1) education in the context of economic realities, 2) educational finance and planning, 3) the struggle for rural education and 4) curriculum development and educational policy-making. Each of these issues is discussed briefly below.

1. Education in the Context of Economic Realities. In recent years, various social and economic crises have profoundly shaken West African countries, including: low prices for the raw materials West African countries produce and low wages for both white-collar and manual workers as a result, as well as a low rate of food production. In some areas there has been no production at all due to the lack of rain with terrible consequences for human beings, cattle raising and agricultural production.

2. Educational Finance and Planning. In West Africa, education has always been sponsored and financed for the most part by the State. This means if the State has a financial problem, education is directly endangered. And that is usually the case because of drought and the economic problems just described. Most of the countries, therefore, have already identified their spending priorities as food production, health care and cattle raising techniques. That support for early child development techniques has not been a major priority is reflected in governmental budgets. Likewise, long-term rational planning using the results of research data, also related to the available financial resources, has also been inconsistent at best.

Financing education remains unpredictable and erratic. The financial support usually dedicated to education has been cut back and in some cases the masses have been required to contribute to help support the cost of education. Such support is never adequate given the tremendous educational needs of the children and the limited resources available to local populations, on one hand, and the low rate of schooling in most African countries, on the other hand. Where can additional pennies be found to support much-needed educational programs and literacy campaigns or community building projects? It is in the context of this dilemma that loans from the World Bank and the IMF come into play and the story is well known. That is why educational planning and finance are such urgent issues in our countries.

3. The Struggle for Rural Education. The majority of the population lives in villages in rural areas in African countries. Most of these rural area villages have no water supply or electricity. Thus, health and education become critical because of their importance and their costs. Moreover, most of the governmental rural development strategies in these countries rely on village structures in order to implement education and development projects. To serve the masses of people at the village level effectively, adult literacy programs must be developed and implemented in national (indigenous) languages.

4. Curriculum Development and Educational Policy-making. In general, curriculum implicitly or explicitly serves the economic function of preparing young people for the type of work that increasingly characterizes the adult working world. In fact, all the problems just discussed are structural in nature; that means they are related to the prevailing needs of the economy for different types of adult workers at a given point in time. The organization of the curriculum and educational policy-making flow directly from this reality.

Most African countries find it difficult to provide distinctly different curricula, in terms of the focus, balance and orientation of what is taught, to different groups of students as well as an academic foundation for tomorrow's workers. Since the economic base of African societies, which underlies the prevailing curriculum, has been so severely shaken, it is not surprising that the present curriculum (curricula) of our schools is not relevant for the future of the young people who are still attending school. Nor is it surprising that the new degree holders search for jobs where there are in fact no work places ready to receive them.

Furthermore, it is urgently necessary to call to the world's attention that the imposition of foreign languages in every African society has been a main cause of school failure and dropping out of school, underdevelopment and social stagnation throughout the continent. Professor Kahombo Mateen  (1966), senior staff member from the Organization of African Unity in charge of linguistic politics (Niamey, Niger), emphasized that the large majority of the African population does not need to deal with foreign countries (p. 143). The minority of African people who speak foreign languages may use these languages for diplomatic and commercial purposes and foreign languages should be kept in schools but as a second language. Certainly, no one would argue against the importance of learning any other language if possible, since language learning always opens a new door to a new culture. This is an enrichment all by itself. However, Professor Mateen  (1996) added that because of the necessity to master the French language in order to succeed in schools in West Africa, less than 15 percent of young Africans have the chance to accomplish this goal. Now, the question is: Shall we give up or try harder to find solutions? The introduction of indigenous languages in Malian schools, using a scientific approach to assess the impact of this innovation, represents one attempt to search for a solution.

### When the Language of Education Is the Language of Culture

In 1962, two years after the nation's independence from French colonial rule, a national decree required instruction in national (indigenous or home) languages of Mali. Since the 1960s the National Ministry of Education-DNAFLA (The National Office of Functional Literacy and Applied Linguistics) has produced a number of research and specialized linguistic documents as well as curriculum materials to support instruction in Soṅay-senni and Tamasheq (Haidara et al., 1992; IPN–DNAFLA, 1999; Ministère de l'Éducation de Base–DNAFLA, 1995, 1997). The introduction of indigenous national languages for instruction in the schools of the Gao Region in northern Mali, as developed by the Direction Nationale de l'Alphabétisation Fonctionnelle et de la Linguistique Appliquée (DNAFLA), began in 1982-1983.

This pedagogical innovation was also an outgrowth of my previous experiences in the 1970s as Section Chief for Pedagogical Research and Technical Advisor for indigenous and second language instructional methods and materials development at the National Institute of Pedagogy (IPN) under the direction of the National Ministry of Education (MEN) in Bamako. By 1985, after three years of implementation, my office conducted a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of this experiment (Maiga, 1986). A brief description of this pedagogical innovation and a discussion of the outcomes and impact follow.

Experimenting with National Language Instruction in Mali. The field study that we conducted in Gao in 1985 compared the results of instruction for two groups of students, one in conventional public schools and the other in experimental schools, as they moved through grades 1 through 3 (1<sup>st</sup> Form to 3<sup>rd</sup> Form) (Maiga, 1986). Instruction for students in the conventional (non-experimental) schools began in French. Students in the experimental national languages schools in the 1<sup>st</sup> Form (grade) began learning in Soṅay-senni or Tamasheq language, the two indigenous languages spoken in the Gao region. These students were introduced to French in the second quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> Form and as oral language only; they were not permitted to write in French during this period.

Five (5) of the ninety-six (96) schools in the Region of Gao were the first to implement the national language policy of instruction in the home language. To conduct the study the experimental schools were matched with five (5) conventional schools. All ten (10) schools were located in the same general area. The teachers in

these schools had the same formal training, professional degrees as well as the same type of certification and pedagogical preparation. Both groups of schools shared the same challenges with respect to the lack of equipment and shortage of teaching materials and supplies and teachers experienced the same working conditions. The only difference between the teachers in these two groups of schools was preparation for teaching the indigenous languages: teachers in the experimental schools completed a special in-service training to prepare them to teach their own language.

The Regional Office of Education evaluation research team examined six indicators of effectiveness in the five experimental schools (three taught Songhoy-senni; two taught Tamasheq) compared to the outcomes in the conventional (non-experimental) schools. These are the indicators of instructional effectiveness examined in this study:

- Change in class size
- Student pass rates from the 1<sup>st</sup> Form to 3<sup>rd</sup> Form
- Frequency/percentage of students repeating a grade
- Frequency/percentage of students expelled from school
- Frequency/percentage dropping out of school and
- School attendance rates (Maiga, 1986).

The data reported below were collected for the years 1983-1985 by the Regional Office of Education evaluation team under my supervision. Tables 7.1 through 7.6 show the results for each of the above indicators for the cohorts of students who entered the 1<sup>st</sup> Form (grade) at the start of the 1982-1983 school year and who completed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Form at the end of the 1984-1985 school year.

#### Outcomes and Impact Assessment

Class Size. In the experimental schools, 768 students enrolled in the 1<sup>st</sup> Form at the beginning of the year and 870 enrolled in the selected conventional schools (see Table 7.1 below).

[Insert Table 7.1 Here]

Table 7.1 also shows a general decreasing pattern: the number of student in each type of school decreased each year even though the conventional schools began and ended with more students than the experimental schools over the 3-year period. However, the conventional schools started each year with a larger number of students and retained a much higher proportion of their students than the experimental schools.

Pass Rates. Table 7.2 (below) presents the pass rates by type of school. The data indicate a higher pass rate in the experimental schools as compared to the conventional schools at all grade levels (from 16.02 percent; 22.39 percent; 46.67 percent) from the 1<sup>st</sup> through the 3<sup>rd</sup> Form. This effect steadily increases each year until by the end of the third year, the pass rate in the experimental schools more than doubled the pass rate in the conventional schools (84.92 percent compared to 38.25 percent).

[Insert Table 7.2 Here]

School Repeaters. Not surprisingly, the rate of school repeaters is consistent with this outcome. Below, Table 7.3 presents the frequency and percentage of school repeaters, that is, the students who failed to pass to the next grade. The data presented in this table indicate that more students repeated a grade in conventional schools than in experimental schools each year in all grade levels.

[Insert Table 7.3 Here]

Expulsions. The rate of expulsion, which is shown below in Table 7.4, increased each year in the conventional schools. In the experimental schools the rate of expulsion not only decreases, there were no expulsions at all in the experimental schools during the third year. The rate of expulsion decreased from 3.44 percent to 1.62 percent to zero for students in the experimental schools. In the conventional schools, the rate of expulsion, which was higher than the rate in the experimental schools each year, fluctuated from 10.62 percent in the first year to 8.83 percent in the second year and reached a high 12.34 percent in the third year. On this indicator of effectiveness the difference between the schools is quite striking.

[Insert Table 7.4 Here]

Dropout Rate. Table 7.5 (below) shows the dropout rate by type of school. In contrast to an increase in the percentage of dropouts in the second year, the experimental schools had no dropouts in the third year. The percentage of students dropping out also decreased each year in the conventional schools; however, these schools had a higher dropout rate than the experimental schools each year (from 2.27 percent to 0.72 percent and a low of less than 1 percent).

[Insert Table 7.5 Here]

School Attendance Rate. Finally, Table 7.6 presents the attendance rate for each cohort. Consistently, the experimental schools have a higher rate of attendance than the conventional schools, as the percentage of attendance in both types of

schools increased each year. The data also show a steadily increasing rate of attendance in the experimental schools that was not matched in the conventional schools.

[Insert Table 7.6 Here]

It is also interesting to note that while the experimental schools achieved a near perfect rate of attendance (95.65 percent), and the conventional schools improved their attendance rate from 65 percent to a little over 80 percent after the first year, the difference between the two types of schools in rate of attendance increased over the three-year period.

### Discussion

In general, the experimental schools demonstrated a greater degree of effectiveness in terms of the higher percentage of students moving on to the next grade at the end of the year, fewer repeaters, fewer expulsions and fewer dropouts as compared to the conventional schools. Better class attendance was also reported in the experimental schools in comparison with the conventional schools. A number of factors may have contributed to the dramatic decrease in the number of students in the experimental schools by the end of the third year (from 768 initially enrolled to 86). First, the conventional schools were already in existence and as a result, these schools were well known to parents. The experimental schools, however, were newly constructed, had just opened and, as is often the case with any innovation, these new schools were adversely affected by a number of uncertainties and challenges. For instance, there was strong opposition to the teaching of national languages. There was fear, for example, that students would not be able to get a job or be able to further their studies if they did not learn French in the conventional way. Second, teachers who were inexperienced with the new pedagogy were not strong advocates of this new policy. As a result of resistance among teachers who opposed this innovation and tremendous negative propaganda, parents became increasingly doubtful about the validity of instruction in home languages for school success and students were not convinced of the benefits either.

The only explanation possible for the overwhelming success of the experimental schools as measured by all other indicators, however, is the use of national languages as a medium of teaching and learning. What would be the impact of an educational program that uses African languages for instruction from kindergarten through the twelfth grade? As Wa Thiong'o (1981) stated clearly: "The association of the child's

sensitivity” would then be in harmony with “the language of his experience of life” (p. 14).

#### When the Language of Education Builds on Students’ Culture

The Commission on Research in Black Education supported a pilot research demonstration to explore the benefits of African language and culture study for African American students. (Study of African language instruction was recommended as a focus for the work of the Commission Research in Black Education by a panel of African and African American scholars attending the AERA annual meeting in Montreal in 1990.) I co-developed six web-enhanced online Sonjaj-senni (language) and culture lessons and in April 2000 implemented a pilot assessment of these lessons at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, New York.

Implementing a Pilot Research Demonstration. The intent was to use the Internet (web-enhanced lessons) to present new cultural content and historical information including positive information about and vibrant images of contemporary African life today as well. In contrast to prevailing negative images of Africa and African people in the media, the six lessons we developed are visually attractive, dynamic, multi-media, multi-disciplinary and interactive. These lessons introduce students to African history, language, values and cultural practice. Thus, in the case of this pilot demonstration project, the language of education builds on students’ culture. The following research question guided this demonstration research project:

In what ways does re-immersion into African culture, using web-based learning to study African language:

- 1) Broaden the epistemological, axiological and ontological perspectives of students;
- 2) Motivate their learning; and
- 3) Re-orient their energies toward acceptance of diversity as a tool for global problem solving?

A long-term goal in developing this pilot research demonstration is to create a complete online course package that can be made available to students in after school settings such as libraries, community centers and other locations where computers and the Internet are available.

In the six model lessons language is presented in naturally occurring everyday events in which students experience African traditions, values and cultural practices through important social activities, such as a wedding and the installation ceremony

for the Songhoy Chief. These lessons, which were supported by Blackboard.com courseware, included the following topics:

- 1) Introduction to the Lessons
- 2) “Black Is . . .”
- 3) Alphabet & Pronunciation
- 4) Greetings
- 5) Introducing Yourself
- 6) Counting.

This lesson content is adapted from a textbook for English speakers, Conversational Songay Language of Mali (Maiga, 1996). While also keeping the focus on language learning, these interdisciplinary lessons and the pedagogical approach used integrate African language with folklore, philosophy, proverbs, culture, history, geography and politics in Songhoy traditional culture. The lesson entitled “Black Is . . .” exemplifies this integrated pedagogical approach. In contrast to the concept of “blackness” in the English language, the meanings associated with “black” in Songay-senni are extremely and consistently positive. For instance, this lesson presents an animated sequence of definitions, proverbs and a folk tale that explain the meaning of:

- “black water” (hari bibi)
- “black earth” (labu bibi) and
- “black sun” (wayne bibi) in Songay-senni.

The definitions of these terms include: where to get potable (black) water from the deepest part of the Niger River, when to plant crops (when the earth is black) and being mindful of the effects of the (black) sun, at midday when it is brightest. In addition to these examples of cultural knowledge and practices related to the concept of blackness in Songay-senni, the lively folktale about a “choosey Hyena” who learns to appreciate the value and enduring quality of the color black illustrates Songay proverbial wisdom. In sum, this lesson displays African thought and values in the worldview of the Songay (Songhoy) people, e.g., their conceptions of beauty and qualities of character that appeal to young people’s concerns and interests in everyday cultural practices.

Using original footage from Gao, Mali, a team has been set up to produce these lessons in a multi-media web-enhanced format to explore the potential of this instructional medium and to introduce students to an online learning experience that

builds upon and draws them into a deeper understanding of their own cultural heritage as people of African descent. We pilot tested these lessons with a group of middle school students from the Liberty Partnership Program at Middle College High School of Medgar Evers College, CUNY. This after school program serves youngsters with a range of academic abilities and interests. Eight students and a teacher/counselor participated in the after school “cultural enhancement workshop” that was designed expressly for the purpose of implementing and assessing the impact of these lessons on student learning, motivation and engagement. The workshop was spread over four days including an orientation meeting.

Parent permission was secured and the workshops were held in the Faculty Computing Room at Medgar Evers College, where each student was seated at his/her own computer terminal. To eliminate the time required to download the lessons, which include short digital movie clips, graphics and animation, each student manipulated the lessons in CD-ROM format.

#### Outcomes and Impact Assessment

At the end of the workshop students completed an evaluation of the experience. The evaluations indicate that this experience was a creative way to engage students in an interactive mode of learning. For example, during the first session the students settled down right away and learned quickly how to move through material in sync with each other and with the instructor. That is, each student viewed the “pages” and completed various steps required to navigate the structure of the lessons simultaneously on the same page or screen by clicking the mouse. With each workshop session, the students’ interest and fascination increased. The students were engaged in reading, oral practice of the language and there was a great deal of discussion. The performance of the students during the workshops as well as their evaluation forms indicate that what they learned was extremely meaningful. In addition, they were very enthusiastic about the material presented and expressed a desire to continue this kind of learning experience.

Designing and implementing the (Sojay-senni ) online lessons provided a new opportunity to illuminate and uncover hidden connections among African people by means of an integrated pedagogical process. New cultural content, such as the material presented in the “Black Is. . .” lesson, allowed students to consider “blackness” from an African worldview perspective that is positive. For another example, the “Counting” lesson offered students a close-up view of an exciting social

event, a marriage, which was of great interest to African American teen-agers. A video clip presents a Songhoy garasa (griot) singing and counting the wedding gifts at a courtyard reception for a bride-to-be. The guests are dressed in richly colored, flowing robes and the women wear elaborately wrapped matching headscarves. The traditional Songhoy cultural practice of giving the tenth wedding gift to the sisters in family of the husband-to-be served as a contemporary, living social context for uncovering enduring African values like generosity that these students also recognize as a shared cultural connection. In this lesson, students reported that they were able recognize African people expressing conceptions of beauty and enacting valued social graces on their own cultural terms.

We determined that the impact of these images is quite powerful, especially in comparison to the prevalent media depictions of starving, emaciated African children in filthy conditions covered with flies. The “Greetings” lesson was especially memorable and meaningful for these students who learned that Songhoy people place great emphasis on “respect,” as demonstrated in the way they greet each other. Students reported that this aspect of Songhoy culture reminded students of how important it is to them not to be “dissed” (i.e., disrespected).

#### Discussion

Student responses to the evaluation are summarized in the Appendix. As part of his apprenticeship in qualitative research, CORIBE Scholar William Franklin prepared and independent evaluation of this pilot implementation. Preliminary results, which were reported in the CORIBE evaluation, confirm the findings just discussed.

In addition, the interactive style of learning about culture and language enhanced classroom communication and the nature of the content—images of real people, natural sound, lively activities and action embedded in short narrative stories about every day occurrences in Africa today—brings the subject matter to life in ways the students can identify with. This project also demonstrates the potential of a web-enhanced, interactive multi-media approach for developing new cultural content that satisfies current academic standards (e.g., the National History Standards; Global Studies on the New York State Regents Exam). Students also found the content and mode of presentation very enticing and personally engaging. Thus, the design and teaching of these model African language online lessons was a tremendous achievement. To summarize, use of multi-media web-enhanced lessons allows:

- The instructor to organize the learning process in an active, interactive and dynamic mode that is engaging and attractive for adolescents;
- The students to interact, react and communicate directly with the teacher;
- The instructor to make language teaching more relevant and real by incorporating movie clips and animation into text-based lessons;
- Students to encounter the language in naturally occurring settings, scenes and social events in contemporary Sonjay (Songhoy) life that would not ordinarily be found in textbooks; and
- Students to immerse themselves in the sights and sounds of a living African cultural context through language study and engagement with knowledge across the disciplines.

In conventional classrooms communication between the students and the teacher is vertical. In the Songhoy Online Course, the teacher functions in a different mode of communication with the students: the vertical one-way relationship is broken down and a horizontal, two-way communicative mode takes place between the teacher and the students and among the students. This mode of communication sets up the platform for individualized assistance and group work that also permit the students and the teacher to express their views whenever they feel like it.

These lessons were demonstrated for teachers in other settings (at Southern University in New Orleans and the College of Staten Island). Given the now well-known “digital divide,” it is also important to note that these teachers who also experienced these online multi-media lessons agreed that they learned more about using the computer through this experience than ever before.

#### What Is To Be Done Here and There?

The field study comparing two systems of knowledge and pedagogy in Mali—teaching national indigenous languages as compared to instruction in French—is just an indication on a small scale of what it could be like in Africa today when the language of education is in fact the language of culture. Likewise, there is great potential underlying the pilot demonstration of African language instruction for African American students, which can be deepened, broadened and expanded to a full-length course of instruction. After further development, full implementation and evaluation of this next stage, we will have a clearer understanding of all the dynamics an interactive language class online—from the technological underpinnings to the pedagogical elements, as well as the evaluation or assessment components.

Furthermore, the implementation of the Soḡay-senni pilot research demonstration gives us confidence to move forward with the development of other well structured, lessons that articulate selected themes/topics across the disciplines. Lessons that address science content, for example, could demonstrate the relevance of African language to the social, economic and development needs of people here and there. Urgent social, economic and environmental crises and calamities in the U.S. and on the continent are creating an unprecedented educational predicament—a predicament that requires the development of the kind of human competence that will permit people see themselves as capable of solving these challenging problems. These pedagogical experiments in two different contexts of Black education suggest the potential of African language and culture study for the development of such human competence in Africa and the U.S.

It is also important to note broader learning implications of Soḡay-senni instruction. In Gao we observed that learning in home languages creates a context in which indigenous systems of knowledge and thought are made available as a pedagogical resource for problem solving (e.g., student identification with their heritage, appreciation of cultural diversity, etc.). In other words, integrating the cultural knowledge embedded in students' home languages into the curriculum and pedagogy enhances student learning. My observations of the impact of indigenous language instruction inspired the development of the Gao School Museum methodology, an integrated pedagogical approach that I developed as a result of my research, observations and evaluation studies in Gao (Maiga, 1993, 1995). A brief description of the relevance of this approach for the development of human competence follows.

#### Developing Human Competence: The Gao School Museum Methodology

The Gao School Museum methodology was created as a tool for action. That is, this approach links indigenous community knowledge and empowerment with social action. As stated in the book that documents the development of this methodology:

The philosophy of this approach is based on the idea of infusing relevant cultural knowledge and practical experience into the existing school curriculum so that what students are learning (content) and why they are learning it (intent) [are] more closely linked to the country's human resource needs and to its scientific, economic and ecological environment. (Maiga, 1993, p. 24)

Thus, this methodology does not refer to a typical museum where “historical objects” are displayed. Rather it is a place inside the school or a classroom “where curriculum-related objects and documentation collected or made by the students. . . have been identified. . . classified and labeled for use in planning and implementing particular lessons” (Maiga, 1993, p. 34). As these pedagogical supports are integrated into the instructional process, the teachers and students can “see themselves and their lives reflected” in lessons that use this resource bank produced through their collaborative inquiry activities (p. 23).

#### Concluding Comments

The two research experiences presented in this chapter demonstrate a role for research in the quest for possible solutions to the problems African people have experienced when the language of education is not the language of culture—here and there. The examination of the historical interrelationships and current crises in education—in Africa and in the US—suggests the need for an integrated approach to common problems in the search for solutions. The interrelated historical roots of these commonalities can be recognized in contemporary manifestations.

I am a specialist in psycho-pedagogy, language teaching, the history of education, curriculum development and evaluation. In addition, I have served for thirty-eight years as a classroom teacher, teacher educator, School administrator, researcher and professor of higher education in my country and in the U.S. as well. Thus, as an African educator, I have a unique vantage point from which to view the educational challenges African people are facing here and there. I taught both French and “Songhoy Language and Culture” at Southern University in New Orleans and the University of New Orleans. In my French courses in New Orleans, I was amazed to find that African American students at a historically Black university had so little confidence in their ability to learn another language.

In Africa it is not unusual for children to grow up speaking several languages. I speak five languages: two Songhoy (Songhoy/Zerma) co-related languages, one of which is my first language, and Bambana, another language spoken in Mali. I am also fluent in French and English, my fifth language, which I was also prepared to teach in normal school as a second language (ESL) in Mali. Because my African American students also had such little knowledge about the outside world, and a strong desire to learn more about their history and heritage, I developed a Songay-senni (language) course that incorporates knowledge of African thought and culture in language

instruction in new ways. I taught this course in New Orleans using the textbook that I developed for English speakers, which is based on this pedagogical approach (Maiga, 1996/2003).

I have also taught multicultural education and educational psychology courses in the teacher education program at Medar Evers College of the City University in New York—in Brooklyn—where my students were from several countries in Africa (e.g., Ghana, Nigeria), the Caribbean (e.g., Barbados, Haiti, Jamaica and Trinidad) as well as the United States. Their scanty knowledge of our shared African heritage stood out as something all these students have in common. Thus, it seems that wherever we are, African descent peoples are struggling for survival by annihilating awareness of our indigenous cultures so that we can assimilate into the “modern” global mainstream culture. Increasingly, this global culture is epitomized by the culture of the United States, which is often represented in the media through glamorous images of African Americans living the “good life” in sports, music and other forms of consumer success and entertainment. The realities of the African American situation are less well known and understood, if at all, in Africa, on the one hand, and African Americans, like the students whom I have taught, are cut off from their African cultural heritage. They are also denied opportunities to be informed and concerned about realities in Africa today. In other words, they are denied the opportunity to search for solutions. The European (and American) colonial systems of knowledge and pedagogy have inexorably produced these results.

The research findings presented in this chapter suggest the importance of language as one dimension of the educational experience that people of African ancestry share—here and there. As the empirical inquiries discussed above demonstrate, beneficial effects are produced when the language of education is the language of culture, that is, when the content and pedagogy permit students to see themselves and to experience their cultural heritage in the curriculum. Thus, we are well advised to remember the words of Dr. Abdou Moumouni (1998), professor of physical sciences who created the first office of solar energy in Mali, West Africa:

It is clear that as long as African languages are set aside and the actual teaching structure maintained as it is, there can be no serious illiteracy programs nor true educational development nor any safeguard of African originality and personality except as a myth or simply as an abstract mysticism. (p. 94, translated by H. Maiga)

Table 7.1

Class Size from 1983 to 1985

Year	1983	1984	1985		
Grades	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Total	Percentage
Experimental Schools	768	307	86	1,161	11.19 %
Conventional Schools	870	554	492	1,916	56.55 %

Table 7.2

Pass Rate by Type of School

Year	1983	1984	1985	
Percentage				
Grades	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mean
Experimental Schools	58.05	72.28	84.92	71.75%
Conventional Schools	42.03	49.89	38.25	43.39%
Difference	16.02	22.39	46.67	

Table 7.3

School Repeaters by Type of School

Year	1983	1984	1985	Percentage
Grades	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mean
Experimental Schools	32.23	24.47	18.50	25.06 %

Conventional Schools	48.77	28.58	26.27	34.54 %
Difference	16.54	4.11	7.77	

Table 7.4  
Rate of Expulsion by Type of School

Year	1983	1984	1985	Percentage
Grades	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mean
Experimental Schools	3.44	1.62	0	1.68 %
Conventional Schools	10.62	8.83	12.34	10.59 %
Difference	7.18	7.21	12.34	

Table 7.5  
Dropout Rate by Type of School

Year	1983	1984	1985	Percentage
Grades	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mean
Experimental Schools	0.29	0.81	0	0.36 %
Conventional Schools	2.27	0.72	0.22	1.98 %
Difference	1.98	0.09	0.22	

Table 7.6

Average Rate of Attendance by Type of Schools Each Year

Year	1983	1984	1985	Percentage
Grades	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Mean
Experimental Schools	75.50	86.11	95.65	85.75 %
Conventional Schools	65.09	83.04	83.19	76.44 %
Difference	10.41	4.07	13.46	

Appendix

Soᅇay-Senni Language & Culture OnLine Course:

“The People Who Could Fly”

Selected Student Evaluation Data

Eight students completed the evaluation. Their responses are summarized below.

1. Tell us what you learned about Soᅇay language and culture (and about Africa) in this class that you didn’t know before.

- Students reported that they learned some elements of Soᅇay language:

Alphabet, greetings, proverbs and numbers.

2. How is “blackness” defined in Soᅇay language?

- Blackness is defined as having a positive meaning to it.
- Some good things are connected to the color “Black” in Soᅇay language.

It is more positive in Africa than in United States.

3. Is it important for young people here to know about African culture and language? Why or why not?

- Yes, because Black children growing up in a white world need to know who our ancestors were not what the white man thinks they were. . .and we need to know that we are important being Black.”

4. Why do Soᅇay people take so much time greeting each other?

- The Sonjay people take time to greet each other to show respect and consideration.
5. How will this Sonjay online class affect you as a student, as a learner?
- The Sonjay class helped me to use the computer better.
  - We enjoyed learning via computer and Internet because it took teaching to a new level.
  - It will help me to talk with other people and get along with people from here and there.
6. What can students do if they take a class like this on Sonjay language and culture?
- With this education of Sonjay language you can use it to speak to African people.
  - You can use it as a way to identify with the culture in order to learn a lot and know yourself better.
7. What are you going to do with what you learned in this class?
- We are going to teach others what we have learned.
  - We will tell our friends about the language for we know now that being Black is a great opportunity.
8. Write a Sonjay-senni proverb below:
9. Explain what this proverb means in your own words.
- Each student was able to write his or her favorite proverb and explain it in his/her own words (in English).
10. On the other side please tell us: What did you like best about this class? What didn't you like about this class? How can this class be improved?
- We like the class and would not change anything about it.
  - This Sonjay class was excellent because it taught me to use the computer better, speak a new language.
  - I like what was different from what I used to learn in English; and all opinions were accepted.
  - No answers were wrong.
  - There wasn't anything to dislike and I hope the size of the class does not increase.
  - The class can be improved by having more sessions.

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