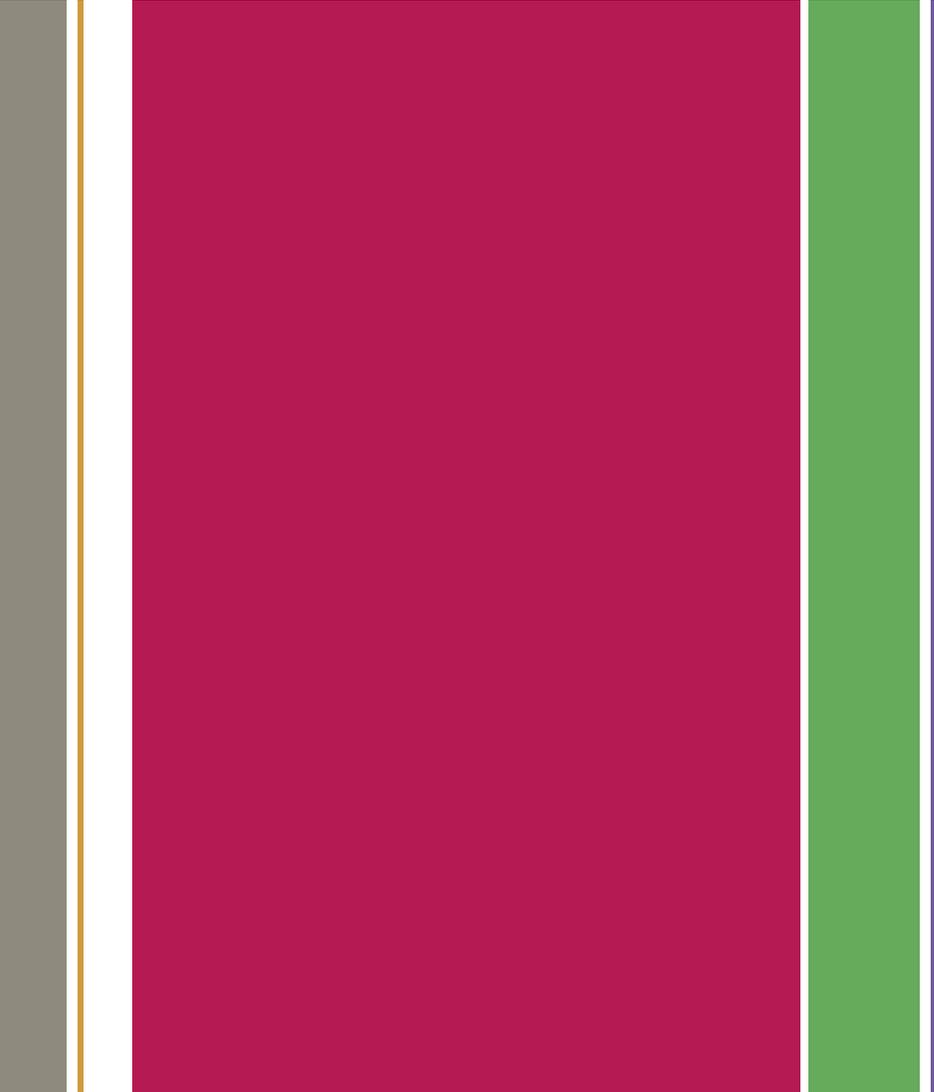


CULTURAL
RESPONSIVENESS,
RACIAL IDENTITY
AND ACADEMIC
SUCCESS: A REVIEW
OF LITERATURE

Executive Summary

Prepared for The Heinz Endowments
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CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS, RACIAL IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Executive Summary

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On the cover is a picture of the Sankofa Bird, which is one of the Adrinka symbols, a system of philosophical ideas represented through images developed by the Asante people of West Africa. Sankofa translates to mean "it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot" and encourages us to take lessons from the past in order to craft a better future.

DEAR COLLEAGUE,

2 | 3

We are excited to share with you recent research commissioned by The Heinz Endowments that addresses the connections between racial identity and school success. It was initiated to help the Endowments' Arts & Culture Program improve the relevance of its arts education programs for African American children, but we have quickly learned that it has broader implications. The work is grounded in the belief that America's urban schools must employ a child's culture so that the child might be motivated to learn in the face of significant adversity.

To explore these issues and to inform our work with the Pittsburgh Public Schools, we commissioned a literature review that we believe will both support and advance the conversation about ethnicity and race within education. This work is a summary of research in these areas and is titled "Cultural Responsiveness, Racial Identity and Academic Success: A Review of Literature." The executive summary of this project is included with these materials while the complete report can be found at www.heinz.org.

Written by Drs. Mary Stone Hanley of George Mason University and George Noblit of University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, this work has helped to create a framework for a grant-making initiative supporting culturally responsive arts education focused on African American children. This initiative has begun with a \$1 million investment in the Pittsburgh Public Schools for the development of three model programs that will connect teaching artists to schools

for intensive residencies spanning as long as three years. These residencies will have the principles of culturally responsive education at their core. In addition, we plan to promote these concepts in other arts and education work of our foundation.

To put into practice what we have learned from leaders in culturally responsive pedagogy, we have developed in partnership with the Pittsburgh Public Schools seven core themes of culturally responsive arts education. The themes are our first effort to knit together the subjects of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and arts education, and can be found at www.heinz.org.

Reflection on this work by Drs. Hanley and Noblit has sparked a great deal of dialogue at the Endowments, and our hope is that its consideration does the same for our colleagues working in the areas of education and the arts.

Sincerely,

JUSTIN LAING

*Program Officer, Arts & Culture Program
The Heinz Endowments*

How do I commit myself to do work that is predicated on a belief in the power of the mind, when African-American intellectual inferiority is so much a part of the taken-for-granted notions of the larger society that individuals in and out of school, even good and well-intentioned people, individuals who purport to be acting on my behalf, routinely register doubts about my intellectual competence?

How can I aspire to and work toward excellence when it is unclear whether or when evaluations of my work can or should be taken seriously?

Can I invest in and engage my full personhood, with all of my cultural formations, in my class, my work, my school if teachers and the adults in the building are both attracted to and repulsed by these cultural formations—the way I walk, the way I use language, my relationship to my body, my physicality, and so on?

Will I be willing to work hard over time, given the unpredictability of my teachers' responses to my work?

Can I commit myself to work hard over time if I know that, no matter what I or other members of my reference group accomplish, these accomplishments are not likely to change how I and other members of my group are viewed by the larger society, or to alter our caste-like position in the society? I still will not be able to get a cab. I still will be followed in department stores. I still will be stopped when I drive through certain neighborhoods. I still will be viewed as a criminal, a deviant, and an illiterate.

Can I commit myself to work hard, to achieve in a school, if cultural adaptation effectively functions as a prerequisite for skill acquisition, where “the price of the ticket” is separation from the culture of my reference group?

— THERESA PERRY

*Young, Gifted and Black: Promoting High Achievement
Among African-American Students*

Perry, Steele and Hilliard, 2003

The dilemmas presented by Theresa Perry, an Africana Studies professor at Simmons College in Boston, are daunting. African, Latino, Asian and Native Americans are faced with negotiating racism while continuing to prove that it is possible to both live their cultural heritage and achieve in school, the community and work.

In 2006, the American Council on Education reported that from 2002 to 2004, 47.3 percent of white high school graduates between the ages of 18 and 24 attended college compared with 41.1 percent of African Americans and 35.2 percent of Hispanics in the same age group. These figures illustrate what children of color are accomplishing, but they also mask greater disparities in areas such as high school graduation rates, which in Pittsburgh, for example, are 58 percent for African American students and 70 percent for white students.

The traditional mainstream view is that achievement for racial minorities is dependent on assimilation into white society. Assimilation implies superiority on the part of the assimilating culture, which is used as the norm by which all others are measured. This relationship often provokes subtle and overt alienation and resistance. Literature on culture, racial identity and academic success indicates that African, Latin, Asian and Native American — ALANA — children succeed by using their racial identity and socialization in response to racism and oppression, and as a means of knowledge production and self-actualization.

So how do we create the conditions that will help more ALANA children succeed in school and society? It is clear that there will neither be an easy nor a direct solution to the racism of American society. Many people have been trying to grasp how we might best proceed by working on many fronts: in schools, in communities and in academic research. This executive summary will discuss what is now known about using culture and race as resources for success in school and life. A full

report on the literature examining work in this field can be found on The Heinz Endowments Web site, www.heinz.org. We conducted the research in response to a request from the Endowments' Arts & Culture Program staff, who had been working with other foundation colleagues and the Pittsburgh Public Schools to better serve students, especially African American children and youth. As part of that effort, and because of the relationship between art and culture, the foundation wanted an assessment that looked at educational strategies using students' cultures and at the role of ethnic identity in promoting resilience and academic success.

We reviewed the available literature on four concepts — culturally responsive pedagogy, positive ethnic socialization, resilience and academic success — and examined research on the connections among them, with an emphasis on arts programming. Our research focused largely on empirical studies and documentation of program experiences relevant to the concepts. It also was primarily concerned with African American students, while including relevant studies of Latin, Asian and Native American students. The resulting literature review was extensive with 119 experts surveyed to ascertain the best sources for inclusion and 2,808 sources contacted or examined. A final set of 146 resources was cited in the full report.

The research shows that many children use their culture and racial identity every day in striving for success in school and life, only to have their race, language and culture disparaged in the process. Imagine the possibilities if cultural, social service and educational institutions worked with ALANA families and communities to help students develop racial identities and enabled them to use these identities to achieve in whatever context that they found themselves. Their culture would be a springboard to learn about the world, which would enable them to cross borders of knowledge and culture, secure in knowing that their understanding and experience is valued.

Instead, the long history of studies on the schooling of ALANA children reveals that for many years the research was flawed by what the literature refers to as an “assimilation logic.” That is, it was assumed that once ALANA students were assimilated into white society, academic success would follow. It also was assumed that students were best served when they gave up their culture as part of being schooled. While assimilation is not a new objective in the education of African American students, it has become the dominant paradigm of public education since the desegregation of the schools ordered by the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court case of *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

School desegregation was based on constitutional principles and had many positive effects, including increased equalization of resources and the institutionalization of civil rights. Yet, school desegregation undercut the value of education for African Americans in numerous ways. First, the numbers of black teachers declined, which meant that African American students were now increasingly taught by whites, the dominant cultural group. Second, in part because of the cultural change in the teaching force, racial uplift and religion were no longer central aspects in the education of black children. This is particularly important to the argument for **culturally responsive pedagogy**. In “Young, Gifted and Black,” Perry proposes that **the narrative of racial uplift must be returned to the education of contemporary black young people as a way to instill direction and purpose**. Finally, school desegregation meant that African Americans were now subject to a key historical logic of public education in the United States — an assimilation logic.

More recently, research literature has come to regard this logic as subtractive. When schools work on this assumption, they negate students’ cultures, denying the students the key resource that they

bring to education. Research now regards culture as a set of tools, perspectives and capabilities, which students can deploy in the pursuit of learning. It is an amalgamation of ways of being, doing and sense making developed across generations and social contexts. **When culture is suppressed or denied, students are educationally disempowered. They find it hard to use their culture to learn.**

A student receives from his or her culture a racial identity, and for ALANA children and youth, their racial identity can connect them to a wider goal of racial uplift. This goal is reminiscent of countless anecdotes of schooling prior to *Brown v. Board of Education*, where students’ learning was connected to an “educational mission,” as in “I must learn so that my community can benefit.” Studies of segregated education have shown that when these institutions were a part of a racial uplift effort, strong, positive racial identities led to high achievement. Researchers have built on studies that uncovered the flaw in assimilation logic, and have generated a substantial body of work that demonstrates ALANA students learn best in culturally familiar settings and when they have strong positive racial identities.

We reviewed research that examined the connections among **culturally responsive educational approaches, racial identity, resilience and achievement**. Several studies included all the concepts, and researchers found that ALANA students performed best in settings that built on their culture and promoted their racial identities. We also located many studies that examined how pairs of the concepts were empirically related. Most of this research is relatively recent and focuses largely on explaining academic success. Some 36 studies led us to conclude that **culturally responsive pedagogy and positive racial identity can play major roles in promoting academic achievement and resilience for ALANA youth**.

In the United States, there are many cultures. There is a white culture that is dominant, while other cultures are subject to that dominance. African American culture, for example, emerges from the history of both Africa and the Americas, and at its best is communal, spiritual, resilient and humanistic. It incorporates verbal expressiveness, personal style, emotional vitality, musicality and an emphasis on facing life without pretense. A culturally responsive pedagogy would use these cultural attributes in curricular and instructional planning, instructional processes, classroom organization, motivational strategies and discipline, and assessment. The attributes would be seen as means to engage student interest, develop ownership of learning and inspire achievement.

In studying the concepts of **cultural responsiveness and racial identity**, we found that the terms include the acknowledgement of racism and racial oppression as a way to help students think critically as they achieve academic and other successes through education. **Resilience** refers to the remarkable ability of humans to recover from adversity, and resiliency is a highly desirable state for children and youth in the direst of circumstances. **Academic success** is a multifaceted concept, but the research tends to focus on grades, achievement test scores, and learning the key concepts and strategies of a planned program of study, such as a literacy program that successfully teaches students how to decode texts.

We concluded that designing programs based on the existing literature is warranted, especially if they are developed so they can be rigorously assessed. We offered nine themes to the Endowments to consider in designing a grants program focused on supporting culturally responsive pedagogy.

Lessons can be taken from the literature in designing culturally responsive pedagogy to promote racial identity, resilience and achievement. Several of these themes deserve special attention.



Themes for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

12 | 13

- 1. USE CULTURE TO PROMOTE RACIAL IDENTITY.** Culturally responsive pedagogy in education requires adaptations in instructional practice, classroom organization and motivational management, as well as in curricula and espoused values. In educational and non-educational programs, the rule of thumb should be to have the program include key aspects of the student's home culture. The pedagogy should focus on developing strategies that use culture to construct a positive racial identity that promotes resilience and success in social institutions.
- 2. USE CULTURE AND RACIAL IDENTITY AS AN ASSET.** Race in culturally responsive programming is to be an asset in learning and development. Programs should be designed so the student's culture is a strength to be deployed in learning. Programs should not be stigmatizing but rather affirming of students and their cultures. Culturally responsive programming has to ensure that students trust educators not to use racial stereotypes against them.
- 3. EDUCATE ABOUT RACISM AND RACIAL UPLIFT.** Programs should provide accurate information about racial oppression and racism as they promote strategies using racial identity to encourage high achievement and resilience in the face of racial oppression. This also will likely include advancing a goal of racial uplift.

- 4. EMPLOY THE ARTS.** The arts, as cultural productions themselves, are ideal vehicles for culturally responsive programming. The literature indicates that arts programs that engage a student's culture and racial identity will likely result in the learning of a wide range of competencies.
- 5. DEVELOP CARING RELATIONSHIPS.** There should be a focus on developing caring relationships, as many children do not see education as a simple transaction but rather as a process in which adults must first demonstrate caring in order for the child to be willing to learn. This is said with the caution that caring relationships are themselves culturally defined. Students then interpret what is caring from their culture, not from the culture of the person offering a caring relationship.
- 6. ASSUME SUCCESS.** Programs all too often are designed to deal with problems and deficiencies. It is much preferable to have programs that recognize the wealth of culture and experience that every student brings, and are geared to build on academic, cultural and racial strengths.

7. PROMOTE ACTIVE LEARNING, PROBLEM-BASED INSTRUCTION AND STUDENT INVOLVEMENT. Culturally responsive pedagogy in education requires adaptations in instructional practice, classroom organization and motivational management, as well as in curricula and espoused values. Culturally responsive pedagogy involves active learning, curricular integration, problem-based and project-based instruction that apply to real world situations, student participation in decision-making, critical thinking and a respect for difference. High expectations should be the rule for educators, parents and students.

8. INVOLVE THE COMMUNITY. Culturally responsive pedagogy and programs must have the active participation of the community. Culture is constantly changing and varied, even within a racial group, and community and family members can be valuable in informing educators about the needs and resources of the children and youth whom they know in ways that educators cannot. The challenge for some professionals is to design programming and/or pedagogy for a culture that is not their own. Educators will need a better understanding of culture(s) and an awareness of how to use culture effectively. Thus, they also need skills in inquiry and the ability to listen to children and families, so that they can best take advantage of what is learned in these conversations.

9. ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHALLENGES. Culturally responsive work requires many educators to change their frames of reference about the culture of ALANA children and families, and all children from low-income socioeconomic backgrounds. The notion of cultural deficiency as the source of academic deficiencies is rooted in notions of the cultural supremacy of a middle-class, Anglocentric ethos that permeates every aspect of society and the institutions of education — kindergarten through 12th grade and beyond. Teacher education should be a place to begin to unravel this way of thinking, but there are few comprehensive multicultural teacher education programs. Expect the change to be challenging and difficult, to require courage and tenacity, and to be rewarding.

CONCLUSION

There is sufficient evidence for us to recommend that The Heinz Endowments make investments in programs that employ culturally responsive pedagogy and emphasize positive racial identity in order to promote academic achievement and resilience. In-school and out-of-school programs can be designed to develop the connections among these objectives and to more generally promote the wider goal of racial uplift in ALANA communities. The approach will need to be systemic and to directly address issues of racism and assumptions about ALANA children having deficits. Designing programs based on recognizing and building capacity in students, communities, educators and schools has been shown to lead to academic success for ALANA students. Yet, given that there is a widespread belief that students should give up their culture and identity in order to achieve, there will be many challenges to overcome. Embracing these challenges is essential to the success of such initiatives.

