

EVALUATION OF SELECTED CORIBE ACTIVITIES

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This is the Executive Summary of the evaluation of selected CORIBE activities that was prepared by Linda C. Tillman, William Franklin and Jean Ishibashi. The full report includes the scope of CORIBE activities, however, this summary focuses primarily on the OnLine Graduate Student Research Training Institute. Entitled "We Must Sit Down Together (Online) and Talk About a Little Culture: A Web-Based Training Institute in Black Education Research Practice," the Online Institute was offered in February-March 2000. This report is, in part, based on interviews with planners, faculty mentors and Commissioners, data collected from the OnLine Institute and the mini-course participants and an analysis of various documents related to the CORIBE initiative.

OnLine Institute. Dr. Joyce King and Dr. Annette Henry, Co-Directors of the OnLine Institute, developed this six-week model approach to graduate student research training as part of CORIBE's effort to address particular needs in the professional education of doctoral students as well as certain epistemological issues that are contributing to tensions within AERA. Central to these epistemological issues is the matter of culture—in research, knowledge production, educational practice and the worldview of researchers/educators. The content and methodological approach of the OnLine Institute operationalized the theoretical proposition advanced by Sylvia Wynter: that is, in order to address fundamentally the crisis in education and the problematic status of Black people, "we must learn to . . . talk about a little culture" —but not in the cultural deficit or culture-blind terms of the mainstream research paradigm. (Sylvia Wynter articulates this theoretical perspective in two papers that are available on the CORIBE website on the Working Colloquium page.)

The OnLine Institute consisted of a distance learning course delivered on the CORIBE website in a BlackBoard.com environment; five mentoring experiences and a follow-up mini-course workshop, co-sponsored by the AERA Professional Development and Training Committee (PD&T). The mini-course workshop took place at the AERA 2000 annual meeting in New Orleans. The purpose of the OnLine Institute was to engage graduate students and faculty mentors in culturally mediated research experiences that provided opportunities for participants to reconceptualize and to critically assess research practice from an Africana worldview perspective. The beneficial outcomes of this demonstration project underscore the need for an approach to graduate student mentoring, socialization and development that recognizes the centrality of culture in education and the knowledge production process. The OnLine Institute can be accessed from the "What We Do Page" of the CORIBE website.

Several problems prevented the full participation of students in and completion of the planned learning activities: 1) technological difficulties (i.e., equipment configurations, the level of students' technical knowledge/experience); 2) the time frame (e.g., not enough time and schedule conflicts); and 3) conflicting personal and academic commitments. For instance, the Online Institute began later than the targeted start up date; the syllabus that is currently on the CORIBE website was revised and scaled down; nevertheless, participants had difficulty completing the assignments. Also, fifteen graduate students were expected to participate. Of those who initially indicated an interest, however, eight graduate students,

enrolled in doctoral and masters degree programs at the University of New Orleans, Xavier University of Louisiana, SUNY Buffalo, the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of California at Berkeley and Florida State University, participated in various aspects of the OnLine Institute. Other graduate students who were not involved in the online activities also participated in the AERA mini-course.

Mentoring Experiences. OnLine Institute faculty organized five mentoring experiences: the Critical Analysis Group (Dr. Annette Henry); the Readers Theatre Group (Dr. Cirecie West-Olatunji); the DIRECT Center Conference/OnLine Journal Group (Dr. Mwalimu J. Shujaa), the DIRECT Center Relational DataBase Group (Dr. Mwalimu J. Shujaa and Dr. Nah Dove) and the Participant Evaluation Group (Dr. Linda C. Tillman). The evaluation data (elaborated in the full report) indicate that students perceived this professional development experience as an effective way to interact with accomplished African American scholars from various institutions (mentoring), as an opportunity to expand their knowledge base with regard to research, including epistemological and methodological issues, and as a means to increase their understanding of an Africana worldview perspective.

The learning that occurred was reciprocal. For example, the Critical Analysis mentoring experience was designed to involve students in a critical examination of the AERA program in light of their own research interests and using content analysis to explore epistemological and methodological issues involved in conducting research from an Africana worldview perspective. Fannie Haughton, a classroom teacher, teacher education professor and UC Berkeley doctoral student, who worked the Critical Analysis Group, raised a crucial issue regarding the inconsistency she perceived between the worldview and the actual practice of the Online Institute. Ms. Haughton pointed out that a “mentor” is a European construct that also implies a type of hierarchical relationship that is inconsistent with the perspective and cultural ethos espoused by the OnLine Institute faculty. She suggested using the African concept “Jegna” as a culturally consistent conceptual and methodological alternative.

Jegnoch (plural) are special people who have demonstrated determination and courage in the protection of his/her people, land and culture, show diligence and dedication to our (African/African American) people, produce exceptionally high quality work and dedicate themselves to the protection, defense, nurturance and development of our young by advancing our people, place and culture. In addition, Hilliard describes a Jegna as a great master teacher (personal communication). The Co-Directors discussed this critical feedback with other participants. Cirecie West-Olatunji, who was aware of the discussion that had taken place in the Association of Black Psychology, located an article written for the Black Graduate Student Psychology Association newsletter that articulated a rationale for replacing the concept of “mentor” with this African language concept. This article and the critical feedback enriched our dialogue and contributed to our understanding of the concerns of Black graduate students. (See the CORIBE Briefing Book for a copy of this article, “The Concept of Jegna,” by Tiffany Herbert.)

The Readers Theatre Mentoring Group included two graduate students at Xavier University of Louisiana, Kimberly Frazier and Kalpana Saravanan, who worked closely with their faculty mentor, Dr. Cirecie West-Olatunji, to complete a web-based research project that documented the Black Experience in the academy. The data was presented as a Readers Theatre/Minstrel Performance at AERA 2000 entitled, “The Lives of Harriet Jacob's Children in the Academy: A New Millennium Readers Theatre Minstrel Performance.” Dr. West-Olatunji's students learned qualitative research skills, including the collection, analysis, interpretation and presentation of interview data that documented the voices of Black faculty. The “minstrels” who performed this data included: Kassie Freeman, Annette Henry, William Franklin, Shuaib Meacham, Terezinha Juraci Machado da Silva (Brazil), Linda C.

Tillman, Joyce King, Mwalimu J. Shujaa and Mackie Blanton. Heidi Lovett Daniels and DrRashon provided technical support for the multi-media presentation Dr. West-Olatunji developed. (See the “What We Do Page” of the website for a copy of the program. The script can be found in the CORIBE Briefing Book.)

The Center for **Diopian Inquiry and Research on Education as Culture Transmission** (DIRECT Center) at Medgar Evers College organized two mentoring experiences for the OnLine Institute: preparations for the “Uncovering Connections” international conference at Medgar Evers College/CUNY, which also involved reviewing submissions for an online journal and contributing to the DIRECT Center relational database. This database is an online interactive catalogue of bibliographic materials on intergenerational culture transmission (See the “What We Do Page” on the website.) Sessie Aboh and Greta Gladney participated in these mentoring experiences that included reviewing research papers for the conference and learning how database abstracts are constructed. The database, developed by Dr. Mwalimu J. Shujaa and Dr. Nah Dove, can also be accessed through the Medgar Evers College website <www.mec.cuny.edu>.

The evaluation of the CORIBE initiative constituted another mentoring experience. The lead evaluator, Dr. Linda Tillman, whose research focuses on mentoring, and her mentee, Dr. William Franklin (an experienced researcher trained in quantitative methods), were assisted by Jean Ishibashi, a UC Berkeley doctoral student in education. Ms. Ishibashi assisted in the development of the interview protocol for data collection and the analytical coding scheme as well as the selection and analysis of relevant literature. William Franklin also completed an assessment of the Songhoy OnLine Language & Culture Course (another CORIBE demonstration project developed by Dr. Hassimi Maiga, Dr. King and TekAfrika Digital Media). This mentoring triad (an experienced and a novice qualitative researcher and a graduate student of a different cultural background) implemented a participatory evaluation process that was at the same time a collaborative mentoring experience. Their individual voices (Black woman in the field of education administration and leadership, Black man in developmental psychology, Japanese American woman community activist and educator) contributed unique perspectives on issues of epistemology and methodology from an Africana worldview perspective and a non-African American cultural base. The use of a culturally mediated, culturally sensitive collaborative approach to mentoring is a departure from the dominant paradigm approach and is one that Dr. Joyce King and Dr. Linda Tillman previously implemented in another setting.

Student and faculty evaluations indicate that both groups valued this culturally mediated learning experiences and the collaborative and participatory nature of the relationships that were developed. These mentoring or Jegnoch relationships helped to meet students' intellectual and personal needs in terms of socialization into the academy, guidance and direction, development of research skills, understanding how to pose questions, and becoming oriented toward/staying connected to an Africana worldview perspective in research. The opportunity to become a part of the Commission's deliberations on the "epistemological crisis" in AERA (Gordon, 1997) and to contribute to the development of a changed paradigm within AERA was a significant factor in the students' desire to participate in the OnLine Institute. In addition, during the mini-course workshop both faculty and students affirmed the quality and content of the instruction and the need for this type of research initiative and professional education program.

The use of technology as the primary method of communication between mentors and graduate students and for the dissemination of knowledge and information provided opportunities as well as challenges. Working closely with Dr. Joyce King, TekAfrika Digital Media developed the CORIBE website www.coribe.org, which has served as the “hub” for the CORIBE initiative. DrRashon, the “Web-Nana,” was assisted by Heidi Lovett Daniels, a doctoral student at Florida State University, who served as the CORIBE technical advisor.

As Assistant to the Web-Nana, Ms. Daniels helped to bridge between the technical and psychological divide that some OnLine Institute students and faculty and other CORIBE participants experienced. Ms. Daniels described the support she provided as “technological love”: She kept "office hours" on the website where students and faculty could contact her; she taught some computer literacy basic skills and she helped participants resolve technical glitches. She also kept the Co-Directors informed, almost on a daily basis, of problems and challenges that needed to be addressed.

Mini-course Workshop. Graduate students, faculty mentors, CORIBE Elders Council members, Frank Bonilla and Baba Kwame Ishangi, and invited AERA scholars attended the mini- course. Activities included a CORIBE website demonstration, presentations of an Africana worldview perspective by invited scholars (Mwalimu J. Shujaa, Nah Dove and Hassimi Maiga), a mentoring team presentation (Annette Henry and Fannie Haughton), a brief discussion of the online activities by graduate students and a story circle conversation about how critical life experiences shaped cultural commitments and perspectives in research. Participants in the story circle included Dr. Ibrahima Seck (Senegal), Dr. Petronilha Gonçalves e Silva (Brazil) and Dr. Frank Bonilla. During this 4-hour mini-course workshop graduate students had the opportunity to gain additional knowledge about research epistemology and methodology, to discuss the potential of culturally mediated online learning and mentoring experiences and to enhance their knowledge of how senior scholars are using an Africana worldview perspective in research. The mini-course evaluation indicates that students:

- 1) Participated to gain a better understanding of how technology could be used in their research, to meet and dialogue with fellow graduate students and to interact with their mentors and other African American scholars;
- 2) Enhanced their knowledge of an Africana worldview perspective and described it as a perspective that: embodies African-centered values, can be used as a pedagogical lens and encompasses the historical, political and sociological significance of African culture to African (American) people in the Diaspora.
- 3.) Indicated that future online institutes should provide more: research training and technical assistance, long term mentoring experiences, feedback on developing conceptual frameworks, writing and publishing, connections with fellow students who are using culturally sensitive research approaches and knowledge about how to create a voice in the larger community of scholars.

Contribution/Involvement of Invited International Scholars. International scholars from Senegal (Dr. Ibrahima Seck), Mali (Dr. Hassimi Maiga), England (Dr. Nah Dove) and Brazil (Dr. Petronilha Gonçalves e Silva, Terezinha Juraci Machado da Silva) also participated in the mini-course workshop. In addition, the brief commentaries several of these scholars prepared in response to the Commission’s research papers are available on the CORIBE website. Including the voices of international scholars has affirmed the importance of the global dimension of the crisis in Black education and the significance of research in the development of solutions. In addition, as indicated in these commentaries and research briefs, these scholars have identified specific benefits of working collaboratively within a shared Africana worldview perspective.

Non-African American Perspective. In keeping with AERA's commitment to diversity, the OnLine Institute also included a focus on documenting the relevance of this research training approach for other racial and ethnic groups. Jean Ishibashi participated in the PD&T mini-course and the Evaluation Group mentoring experience. The following is an excerpt from her reflections on the experience (the full text is available in the CORIBE Report to the AERA Council):

I was interested in participating as a team evaluator of the CORIBE initiative because I was interested in (a) how CORIBE practiced "intellectual affirmative action" or recognizing, respecting and re-telling different epistemologies, specifically the Africana worldviews, values and cultures, (b) how CORIBE would build alliances within and outside the African American community(ies) and (c) how oral history and traditions, dialogue and conversation would be practiced in order to uncover memories of different knowledge constructions. I found the challenge of this initiative is to reflect on how to negotiate, strategize and act upon the different knowledge constructions of our home cultures and communities when we have internalized so much of the dominant culture and are in the middle of one of the main institutions of the dominant knowledge constructions, AERA. How to ally with the repressed and suppressed memories of our ancestors' knowledge, I argue, is one of the steps to becoming whole and allying with others. I am hopeful that this opening in AERA through CORIBE will allow "intellectual affirmative action" to take place.

Conclusion. CORIBE has been successful in meeting its intended short term goals: addressing specific research training needs of African (American) graduate students; providing opportunities for trans-disciplinary discussion and online deliberations among scholars in order to address the perilous condition of Black education in the U.S. and other contexts and examining alternatives to the epistemological crisis in education research that is "contributing to tensions within AERA."

It is reasonable to assume that questions may be raised about the credibility of the "emergent evaluation methodology" used to create this Evaluation Report. The credibility of this type of evaluation lies, to a great degree, in the confirmability of the findings. That is, the extent to which there is agreement regarding the findings among the evaluation team members and the participants. The methodological rigor of the data collection, analysis and interpretation of the findings and specific recommendations are discussed more fully in the complete report that is available in the CORIBE Briefing Book in another section of the website.

Two issues were found to be of primary importance to the OnLine Institute: content and delivery. The OnLine Institute produced instructional and research training materials that can help to illuminate the Africana worldview perspective. The issue of delivery pertains to the use of technology as the primary method of communication. Mentor-mentee teams made efforts to accomplish as many of the stated objectives as they could, given the technological difficulties and time constraints. Both students and faculty were enthusiastic about continuing this initiative after the AERA annual meeting. Thus, while this CORIBE project was challenged by the technology, the planners and evaluators are now more knowledgeable about what students affirm they need in terms of mentoring, instructional content and technological assistance. The work of the Commission thus far represents an important first step in demonstrating a model approach to developing and using knowledge and methods that reflect an Africana perspective to support graduate student learning and development.

References

Edmund W. Gordon (1997). Report of the Task Force on the Role and Future of Minorities in the American Educational Research Association. Educational Researcher, 44, pp. 44-52. The report is available on the CORIBE website.