Rethinking Open and distance Education Practices: Unearthing Subjectivities and Barriers to Learning

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Introduction

This paper presents a new orientation towards open and distance education, through which its status and practices could be examined and improved. This new orientation is a theoretical one adapted from the Afrocentric[1] research methodology I created (Reviere, 1996)[2]. It provides a philosophical and methodological framework through which open and distance education can be re-examined and reconstructed. The creation of new theories and the strengthening of existing ones are critical roles that universities, especially those in the less-industrialised countries, can play in the development and enhancement of open and distance education.

This new orientation suggests that open and distance education should be practised from an Afrocentric place[3]. I need to pause here briefly to clarify the concept of an Afrocentric place. The Afrocentric place is a rightly shaped perspective that allows all stakeholders, including learners and facilitators, to put their ideals and values at the centre of the learning process/activity. The Afrocentric place always includes the principles of inclusivity, cultural specificity, critical awareness, committedness, and political awareness. Hence, by definition, Afrocentricity and the Afrocentric place describe an *inclusive* philosophy. Despite the "Afro" in the name, the intention is to focus on any individual or group being served, in order to make them the subject, and not the object, of whatever activity is being undertaken. In other words, one of the principal objectives of Afrocentrism is to provide or return power to the hands of those being served, so that their interests and needs can influence the learning activity. This focus on the individual is particularly important in diverse communities like the Caribbean, since we are a widely acknowledged, and mostly successful, multi-ethnic (and multi-national) society.

The Afrocentric approach described in this paper will provide new yardsticks (which I call Afrocentric canons[4]) against which knowledge and its acquisition should be judged. A new approach is necessary because, both historically and culturally, knowledge acquisition in the less industrialised countries like the Caribbean has been a passive[5], hierarchical[6], and privileged[7] activity. This new Afrocentric orientation to knowledge acquisition and use pushes the education debate (especially as it concerns open and distance education) into another realm, where the processes of knowledge acquisition, and the content acquired, become subservient to the usefulness of that knowledge and how it affects the well-being of the people being served. This paper argues that the traditional modes of knowledge acquisition and learning criteria, to which most of us have been exposed, are inadequate and incorrect, especially in a context with a diverse racial or other mix, and this is especially important for the more mature learners, as make up the distance education population in the Caribbean. Employing an Afrocentric approach, as in the canons employed here, will provide more useful criteria.

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The dissemination and acquisition of knowledge is now widely accepted as a subjective process, fraught with interference from the societal baggage that facilitator, learner, and other participants bring to the learning activity. Therefore, the more appropriate and reasonable criteria from which to judge knowledge acquisition and dissemination are the five Afrocentric canons that I present in this paper. Later, in the section entitled: "Applying the Afrocentric Learning Canons", I will discuss some ways in which open and distance education programmes can employ these canons.

Most people in historically oppressed societies like those in the Caribbean see education as a valuable commodity, most likely because it is so strongly associated with privilege. However, it is only over the last five decades or so that education in the Caribbean, for instance, became accessible to all societal levels, and this access is still limited. For instance, up to the late 1960s, education in the Caribbean was only guaranteed up to the primary level, so there was great competition for the few secondary places available, and university education was a dream for most, except for the privileged and the wealthy. All of these factors served to foster the concept of education as a highly prized commodity available mainly to the elite and, hence, access was highly competitive. The Education Reform Working Group (1991) showed that as recently as 1990, some of the smaller Caribbean countries, for instance, could provide only less than half of the eligible children with secondary school places. In fact, according to 1980-81 Caribbean censuses, only between 12-13% of the entire Eastern Caribbean population aged between 15-64 had attained a secondary education (Education Reform Working Group, 1991). All of this helps to explain the urgent need for open and distance education, and why we need to pay attention to more than the acquisition of formal knowledge. We must also take seriously the need to empower open and distance learners and their communities. In other words, we need to turn the learners into free decision-makers with regard to their own education.

It is with these observations and recommendations in mind that I am offering my new Afrocentric approach. In the next section, I will briefly describe the Afrocentric philosophy behind my approach. I will then go on to describe my Afrocentric canons and show how they can be employed in the interests of the open and distance learner. Before I continue, I will define open and distance education, as used for the purposes of this paper.

'Open' or 'distance' education are terms used to describe alternatives to traditional taught courses where the teacher and student interact directly through face to face contact (Howarth et al., 2000). Distance and open education models definitely play an important role in education by providing access to education for the traditionally disadvantaged, and less accessible, segments of the world's population. To a large extent, open and distance education modes of delivery and learning/teaching were designed to offer maximum flexibility for the educational needs of the target learners.

One of the main features of open and distance education has been described as providing a wide range of teaching strategies, especially in the use of independent and individualised

learning methods. These features also include the provision of a wide range of learning opportunities and the improvement of both the opportunity and the quality of access to education, while also increasing the chances of success. In addition, open and distance education incorporate learner-centred philosophies of learning (Howarth et al., 2000 citing Rowntree (1992).

The concepts of open, and especially distance, education and the attendant new developments like online delivery, have been greeted in the less industrialised societies as the answer to many or most of the problems in our educational systems. However, there is a very present danger that we will embrace these developments in the same uncritical way that we have most developments from the more industrialised societies, especially the Western ones. While most less industrialised communities who have adopted or adapted distance education programmes can honestly report some success towards meeting their identified needs, if we were to allow ourselves the space to reflect on the philosophy and practice of distance and open education, we could surely help ourselves and others in the long run. We could avoid the added danger of creating new forms of imperialism, with one or two countries dominating large parts of the educational market with their view and their interpretation of knowledge and information and, consequently, causing local learners to suffer serious disadvantage (Dhanarajan, 2001). Reflection would, therefore, reinforce the need for caution to ensure that the question of access and equity must always be a primary consideration for those engaged in distance and open learning. We must also ensure that there must always be a focus on the need to win the support and involvement of the community as part of good practice; and that priority be placed on rethinking all aspects of open and distance education (content, delivery, assessment, etc.), since academe has generally been slow or totally disinterested in revisiting the ways in which learning outcomes and achievements, and other experiences, can be accessed and improved.

If learning experiences are well constructed to meet the learner's needs, they can empower the learner, and this is what the Afrocentric approach seeks to do. The Afrocentric approach ensures that people who are disempowered be given the opportunity for more control over their lives, for a greater voice in institutions, services and situations that affect them, rather than simply being recipients of exercised power.

The Afrocentric approach to open and distance learning would ensure that all stakeholders bring to the fore and explore the notion of 'barriers to learning'. A 'barrier to learning' is not necessarily an attribute of the learner but may be any factor that inhibits learning, for example, the nature and structure of the course, the teaching methods employed (Howarth et al., 2000). For students to successfully take responsibility for managing their learning, they need an opportunity to explore the blocks and barriers that may inhibit their self-directed learning, in other words, they need to practise introspection (as described later in the section entitled "The Centred or Afrocentric Learning Process". The Afrocentric process also entails developing a harmonious relationship, or working closely with course facilitators (lecturers, tutors, curriculum developers and course writers) to identify ways in which programmes can be delivered to meet the individual's particular needs and to promote learning. All stakeholders should try to achieve some sort of consensus on an agreed set of principles specifying the nature and scope of content, good design and layout, mode of presentation and so on.

To conclude this section, I would suggest that the concept of "open" in open and distance education be expanded to include issues of truth, harmony, justice, community and commitment for all stakeholders in the activity, most especially for those who are most vulnerable, such as the learners. These five factors are the base of my five Afrocentric canons, named after their Swahili translation.

The Afrocentric Approach

Afrocentricity is an ideology of liberation that presupposes that all individuals and groups have a centre from which they operate. For African peoples, for example, being African is the centre, with all that implies; for Nigerians, being Nigerian is the centre; for Chinese, being Chinese is the centre; and for Caribbean peoples, being Caribbean is the centre. This could be particularized even further, in that a Carib/Garifuna[8] person living in the rural areas of a Caribbean island will be centred on their particular community[9] and, hence, their specific history and culture will have to be included in the forefront of any learning exercise. In defining a centre or Afrocentric location or place, one need not be restricted to issues of ancestral identity but may include any factor that could influence their access to, or interaction with, the learning activity. Afrocentricity suggests that in explaining or defining our experiences, whether historical or contemporary, the discourse must be one that places learners at the centre, thereby moving them from the margins and thus empowering them so as to make them the subjects and not the objects of the learning encounter.

In his four major works on Afrocentrism, Asante describes a set of basic beliefs that Afrocentrists must hold (Asante, 1980, 1987, 1988, 1990), and which are acknowledged by Collins (1990), Banks (1992), and Milam (1992). They all agree that Afrocentrists must assume the responsibility for uncovering any hidden, subtle, racist, or other obstructive theories that are embedded in current explanations of the human condition (in other words, they must empower themselves); they must work towards the legitimising of the codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of their own ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring knowledge; and they must maintain practices rooted in a strict interpretation of place (Asante, 1990), i.e., they must locate themselves in their own realities, or be self-aware.

In adopting a truly Afrocentric approach to learning, the learner must go through two phases of consciousness: (i) the consciousness of oppression (where most people are and stay), and (ii) the consciousness of victory (where we go from here). In both of these forms of consciousness, a person's values and experiences must play a pivotal role.

The practice of Afrocentrism has to be a self-conscious effort by all the participants in the learning process for it to be truly effective. This is especially true for those of us in previously conquered societies, for we have, to a very large extent, lived and learned within a Eurocentric framework and, as a consequence, we tend to claim European (in my case, British) assumptions and values as our own, without giving much thought to their truth or relevance to our own experiences. We, therefore, need to determine, or unearth, the values and assumptions we hold about education and learning, and we have to decide which of our values contribute in defining our place as centred learners (i.e., which of these values are of relevance to us as learners, and which are not), and which values we need to retain. In other words, we have to decide which values are shared by other learners/stakeholders, and which can therefore be defined as learner-centred values. This would involve serious pre-reflection, or introspection, about the learning process and activity.

Whether people acknowledge the fact or not, their life experiences act as a filter through which the world is viewed. Their life experiences influence all aspects of the knowledge process: the topics they choose, the kinds of knowledge they choose to acquire, and how they interpret the knowledge acquired.

As I have already made clear, Afrocentrism is the conceptual framework being presented in this paper. In its most fundamental expression, it is learners assuming the right and the responsibility to define their own learning needs from their own perspective, employing their own values and ideals (adapted from Asante, 1988). From this basic premise, the concept has been employed by scholars in a variety of ways: the development of new curricula to serve the needs of Black children (Dei, 1999a; Giddings, 2001; Oliver, 1988); the formation of new paradigms that challenge the rules governing Eurocentric research and academic practices (Asante, 1987, 1990; Banks, 1992; Dei, 1999b, 2000; Lee et al., 1990; Nobles, 1986; Reviere, 1996, 2001); the use of the Afrocentric canons to analyse text (Reviere, 1995, 1996); and, in this instance, developing a centred-learning approach for open and distance learners.

The need for an Afrocentric approach to open and distance education comes from the supposition that contemporary formerly conquered peoples have been culturally dislocated through the processes of European colonisation (in most cases), the slave trade, and indentureship. There appears to be a lack of congruence between the current ethos of many of these people and what they ought to be, as predicated by cultural retentions and cultural memories. For instance, there is a frequent criticism that education in the Caribbean has traditionally served to educate its people away from their communities. This is true to a significant extent, since our formal educational structure has been essentially a British export which has only relatively recently been receiving a Caribbean flavour through the University of the West Indies (UWI), the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), and other Caribbean educational institutions. Afrocentricity, therefore, is an attempt to locate a people in their own cultural centre, thus allowing them to be rid of the trauma and legacy of the destruction of their ancestral civilizations, and pave the way for a victorious future.

The Afrocentric Learning Place

An Afrocentric learning process must be executed from a clearly defined Afrocentric place, and must include a clear description of this place. Since a core belief of Afrocentrists is the inseparability of teacher and learner, the inclusion of place is also important because it is only by maintaining a learning process "rooted in a strict interpretation of place" (Asante, 1990, p. 5) that we can betray all naïve and embedded theories of knowledge acquisition and use. The concept of place, therefore, is a fundamental rule of Afrocentric practice because its content is a self-conscious obliteration of the hierarchical subject-object, teacher-learner, or university-community duality and the enthronement of the learner as a whole person (adapted from Asante, 1990). My five Afrocentric canons can be used to define this Afrocentric learning place, as discussed later in this paper.

The first question an Afrocentrist asks is “who am I?” In defining themselves, Afrocentrists define their place and the perspective they bring to the learning exercise. These concepts of place and perspective are almost always synonymous in Afrocentric literature. For example, if I were to define myself as an Afrocentric open and distance learner, I would have to consider who I am historically: I am rural-born Vincentian, Caribbean, woman, and African. Understanding all these five identities, and appreciating the role each will play in my experiences as an open and distance learner, is the first step in defining and locating my Afrocentric learning place. Or, a White learner in Barbados, say, may define his or her place as including the identities of Barbadian, Caribbean, male or female (as appropriate), and his or her ancestry (European/British/Scottish or however that person identifies himself or herself). A learner may also decide that social/economic class or other factors are important elements in the definition of their place. This is essentially the point Asante (1988) made in his argument that a clear understanding of the concept of place is a very important tenet in Afrocentrism. He claimed then that the knowledge of this perspective is a “fundamental rule of intellectual inquiry because its content is a self-conscious obliteration of the subject/object duality and the enthronement of African Wholism” (p. 5). An Afrocentric perspective will influence the kinds of questions an open and distance learner or facilitator will ask of the learning material and the learning process. Such centredness can only enhance the learning experience, especially for groups who are a minority in any learning environment, since they can legitimately challenge the learning material for omissions of their perspectives.

The Afrocentric learner harmonizes diverse values and experiences into a coherent and comprehensive definition of place. While the exact nature of these shared values may be initially undetermined, it is not permissible to argue about the validity of their inclusion (Asante, 1990). Collaboration among all the stakeholders in the learning activity will be needed to bring these values and assumptions about education and learning to the fore. That is, all stakeholders, most especially the learners, must collaboratively decide (through an introspective process) the *what*, *how*, and *why* of the learning activity.

The Centred or Afrocentric Learning Process

This paper proposes that in order to have a truly effective Afrocentric or centred learning process, knowledge must be evaluated in terms of the five canons I have identified, that is, *ukweli*[10], *utulivu*[11], *uhaki*[12], *ujamaa*[13], *kujitoa*[14], and. These include, but go beyond, Asante's (1990) recommendations of fairness and openness. It is critical that the ultimate authority (or source of validity) for the learning that takes place be the experiences of the learners themselves.

In the process used to locate the Afrocentric place, both the learner and facilitator, and all other stakeholders, must engage in introspection and retrospection. These are two methodological techniques recommended by Asante (1990), which are used to locate the Afrocentric place from which the learning activity is performed. Introspection is concerned with the implementation of the Afrocentric method, and retrospection is concerned with the interpretation of the knowledge obtained from the learning activity. The process of introspection is aimed at ensuring that any obstacles to an Afrocentric process that existed in the participants' own mind was unearthed (adapted from Asante, 1990). The process of retrospection, similarly, helps the participants to ascertain if any personal obstacles existed to an effective learning process. This step is particularly important. The techniques of introspection and retrospection are, therefore, two important phases of the Afrocentric process.

During introspection, the participants in the learning process must seek to unearth any inherent barriers to the learning process, that is, they must practise introspection, and so locate the place from which they operate. The participants must question themselves as to who and what they are; explore their own life experiences and how they shaped their handling of this exercise; decide which of their experiences are peculiar to their own circumstances and which are shared by others; and, finally, determine their beliefs about the learning process and content and how they have affected the process.

During retrospection, in order to arrive at fair and accurate conclusions about the learning process, the participants will have to question themselves after the learning exercise to ascertain if any personal obstacles existed to acquisition and use of the knowledge. They must determine if and how their life experiences hindered or facilitated the learning process, and whether their beliefs were altered in any way during the learning process.

So far, we have seen that the process of location, or of defining the Afrocentric learning place, begins with introspection and ends with retrospection. During each of these two phases, the participant will analyse the situation through the application of the five Afrocentric canons. In the following sections, I will describe this analytical process.

Applying the Afrocentric Learning Canons

Any acceptable approach to open and distance education requires a sufficiently comprehensive approach that addresses questions of how knowledge is being structured and used. The application of my five Afrocentric canons, therefore, mandates that both learners and facilitators consider the political, ideological, social, and cultural beliefs and motivations of participants. This approach necessitates a more comprehensive approach that goes beyond questions of what is learnt, by whom, and how quickly it is learnt, to consider questions of how the knowledge being disseminated is structured and used. The approach I am suggesting requires that all participants be encouraged to search for layers of subtext beyond what is actually revealed in texts and other discourses.

In the next paragraphs, I will outline and discuss the five Afrocentric canons.

The first canon, *ukweli*, refers to the groundedness of educational processes and practices in the experiences of the community being served. The experiences of community members, therefore, should become the ultimate authority in determining what should be taught and how it should be taught. In other words, the standards for establishing the educational needs of the community, and the individuals in that community, must be determined by the real life experiences of the community members. The experiences of the community must become the ultimate authority in determining what is needed by that group and, therefore, the final arbiter of the validity of their experiences.

I have established that one cannot ignore the real life and historical experiences of the community, else one runs the risk of making decisions that do not fit their experiences and needs. Hence, universities must include the experiences of all stakeholders, especially learners, in the construction of courses and programmes. This can be facilitated by the use of frequent and current learner profiles.

Ukweli raises the issue of the subjectivity of truth. Of course, the question could be asked, justifiably, whether the "truth" as experienced by a particular community or individual has more validity than that experienced by any other. However, this question is easily answered since no community or individual has a monopoly on the truth as to which experiences are valid and therefore should count. Instead, each community or individual involved in the learning exercise can contribute a vital part of the truth, and all contributions must be taken into account.

Ukweli, therefore, mandates that the creation of knowledge must be done within the context of the community's own experiences. In the context of Caribbean universities, community would include all possible stakeholders, such as learners, learning facilitators, the campus communities, and the wider societies. The crucial question is how we interpret and explain these experiences and the motivations behind such interpretations and explanations. The participants must state their agenda at the outset so as to provide the appropriate context in which to make decisions. Being silent about, or denying, a political, social, or other agenda does not necessarily mean that it is not present. It is decidedly more honest to openly explore the conscious and other possible motivations that could influence, or have influenced, the

nature and direction of one's educational goals and practices. There must be a shared perception of a notion of a fair and just society.

The second canon, *utulivu*, requires that the educational practitioner should actively avoid creating, exaggerating, or sustaining divisions between or within communities, but should instead strive to create harmonious relationships between and within the participating groups. Of the five canons presented in this paper, this one is, possibly, the most blatantly disregarded by educators.

In applying this canon, the specific issue of whether the consideration of an Afrocentric learning place was, in itself, a violation of the canon must be considered. Mandating that educational practitioners strive for harmonious relationships between and within groups does not prevent them from analysing and exposing communities, groups, or individuals, whose intention, in the opinion of the practitioner, is to create disharmony. While the interests of such a person or persons must be considered, the educator has a greater responsibility to the broader society and especially to those who are intended as the victims of the disharmony.

UWI, to a very limited extent, has begun the practice of *utulivu*, with its new orientation to inclusiveness through its Distance Education Centre (DEC) and other outreach programmes, whose learners are, to a significant degree, adult learners who may be somewhat economically disadvantaged. Universities must consider the diversity among stakeholders since *utulivu* also mandates that these institutions actively seek to include all those groups who have been previously excluded. One group that comes to my mind is the indigenous people of the Caribbean, such as the Garifuna in St. Vincent, who have been long neglected and practically forgotten by the decision-makers in the region.

The third canon, *uhaki*, requires a learning process that is fair to all participants, especially to those being served, and a process in which its applications are mindful of, and empathetic to, the welfare of all the participants. Fairness, in the context of this paper, and as defined by this canon, must apply to all communities with a stake in the outcomes of the educational activity, that is, all stakeholders.

Uhaki mandates that the educator be mindful of the interests and well being of the community being served. The interests of the community of learners should be paramount – this is simply a matter of justice. Application of *uhaki* also means that one cannot ignore the historical and social context in interpreting and reacting to any element of the learning process.

In the context of university education, *uhaki* mandates that all learning materials include the perspectives of all groups making up a specific educational community. It also mandates that the learning material not cause harm to any group included in that community.

The fourth canon, *ujamaa*, requires that the facilitator reject the learner-facilitator/teacher separation and not presume to be the well from which knowledge springs. It requires that knowledge and its dissemination should be informed by the actual and aspired interests of the community. The application of *ujamaa* should reveal the community affiliations of the

participants, in addition to their own assumptions about the separation between learner and facilitator.

Ujamaa stipulates that facilitators place the interests of the subject or learner communities before their own. Because of this, facilitators who subscribe to this canon ensure that their actions are informed by the concerns, criticisms, or experiences of the subject communities. In other words, the role of primary validator must remain with the communities. This means that, in open and distance education programmes, all learning and teaching should be learner centred. Programmes and courses should be as flexible as possible to enable re-orientation of the material to the learners needs. Facilitators should use learners' profiles whenever possible when constructing their courses and programmes. In addition, they should encourage and use student feedback on the usefulness and validity of the learning materials – this is most critical for open and distance learners who use the materials being learnt in their work or in other aspects of their lives.

The final canon, *kujitoa*, requires that the researcher emphasize considerations of how knowledge is structured and used over the need for dispassion and objectivity. This empowers the participant to analyse and interpret the structure and use of text and other discourses, and to reveal the hidden assumptions embedded in such. That is, any acceptable process requires a sufficiently comprehensive approach that addresses questions of how knowledge is being structured and used. Participants must be aware that knowledge is inextricably bound into its social and political contexts.

In applying this canon, that is, while deconstructing the texts, discourses, and processes for assumptions about how knowledge should be structured and used, people have to be cognizant, at the same time, that their own assumptions about the structure of knowledge and their feelings towards participants could influence the kinds of interpretations they end up with. However, clearly outlining their motives and the perspectives they bring to the exercise should alert the stakeholders to any bias they might have inadvertently employed in the analysis.

Learning facilitators in universities (curriculum developers, course writers, lecturers and tutors) should, therefore, cease to present knowledge as unchallengeable facts--learners must be encouraged to interact with the material with open minds and to relate the material, wherever possible, to their own experiences to help to judge its validity. Learners should be encouraged to explore the motivations of the knowledge creators and to explore their own reactions to the material.

The issue of *kujitoa* is intrinsic to Afrocentric experiences, and cannot but improve the quality of the learning process. I believe that a straightforward declaration of commitment puts the onus on the facilitator or learner to engage in continuous self-reflection and self-criticism.

Conclusion

Education, especially in previously conquered societies, is traditionally elitist and control-centralized, with control limited to experts, sometimes expatriate experts, rather than to those

whose lives are directly affected by the learning process. These traditional educators tend to ignore the social context and the historical setting of the learning environment, both of which are crucial to effective and valid learning. Institutions of higher learning in the Caribbean, and elsewhere, have a pivotal role to play in redirecting education to more appropriate and useful channels. This paper is one such attempt.

The paper presented a set of five Afrocentric canons that should be used to reduce the inhibitors and, hence, increase the effectiveness and usefulness of learning experiences for open and distance learners. By using these canons to locate the Afrocentric place from which the learner operates, a learning process will be created that places the learners' experiences and values at the centre of the learning exercise.

This Afrocentric approach addresses many of the criticisms and suggestions encountered in the contemporary literature on education, in general, such as the need to empower learners and to make learning relevant to the real lives of the learners.

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Endnotes

[1]Afrocentrism/Afrocentricity: For the purposes of this paper, this describes a new orientation towards knowledge, in which learners assume the right and the responsibility to define their own learning needs from their own perspective, employing their own values and ideals. It is persons assuming the right and the responsibility to describe their experiences in their own words, using their own values and their own perspectives. Suitably centred Caribbean persons, of whatever ethnic origin, will not question the idea of the centrality of their own ideals and values, but may be prepared to argue over what constitutes these ideals and values. They will seek to uncover and use the codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of their ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining knowledge (adapted from Asante, 1988).

[2] My work is strongly influenced by the Afrocentric philosophy developed by Molefi Kete Asante (Asante, 1988 & 1990).

[3] Afrocentric place*:* This is the perspective that allows the learner to put his or her own ideals and values at the centre of the learning process.

[4] These will be listed and explained later in the paper.

[5] Passive is used here in the sense that the learner has, traditionally, not been expected to contribute to any aspect of the learning process – whether content, methods of delivery, or conditions of learning.

[6] The term hierarchical is used in the sense that learning has been seen as a top-down process, with knowledge flowing only in one direction, from teacher to learner.

[7] Privileged is used here to mean that education in the Caribbean, for example, many decades ago, was the purview of the upper and, more latterly, the middle classes, with only limited access available to the majority of the people.

[8] The Garifuna are a mixture of indigenous Caribbean and escaping or pre-colonial African people (called Caribs by the European conquerors) found in some of the Caribbean islands. These two groups formed a cohesive community that defended some of the Windward islands from European occupation till the latter part of the eighteenth century.

[9] In the context of this paper, community refers to a group of people who have certain specific characteristics and or interests in common.

[10] *Ukweli*: This is loosely translated from the original Swahili as truth. It is the first of my five Afrocentric research canons. This refers to the groundedness of the learning process in the experiences of the community being served. The experiences of community members become the ultimate authority in determining what is to be learned and how and, therefore, becomes the final arbiter of the usefulness of such knowledge to their lives.

[11] *Utulivu*: This is loosely translated from the original Swahili as harmony. It is the second of my five Afrocentric research canons. This requires that the facilitator should actively avoid creating,

exaggerating, or sustaining divisions between or within communities, but should strive to create harmonious relationships between and within these groups.

[12] *Uhaki*: This is loosely translated from the original Swahili as justice. It is the second of my five Afrocentric research canons. This requires that the facilitator should actively avoid creating, exaggerating, or sustaining divisions between or within communities, but should strive to create harmonious relationships between and within these groups.

[13] *Ujamaa*: This is loosely translated from the original Swahili as community. It is the fourth of my five Afrocentric research canons. This requires that the facilitator reject the teacher/learner separation and not presume to be the well from which knowledge springs, whole and well-formed, but that knowledge should be informed by the actual and aspired interests of the community.

[14] *Kujitoa*: This is loosely translated from the original Swahili as commitment. It is the fifth and final of my five Afrocentric research canons. This requires that the facilitator emphasise considerations of how knowledge is structured and used over those of content and acquisition.