

"NAMING MY EPISTEMOLOGY"

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EDCI 788J

African American Education: Examining the Major Paradigms of the Field
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Naming My Epistemology

My Passion

My passion for technology and art drive my desire to create culturally relevant educational media (i.e. software, animation) for African-American students, grade PreK-12th. My primary career goal is to provide the tools, resources, and physically safe spaces [specifically in the Washington, DC area] needed to learn about and manipulate technology, multimedia, art, and any combination thereof [new media] as mechanisms for learning and as powerful forms of self-expression.

As true as it is cliché, Knowledge is Power; and in this, the information age - the engineer, the hobbyist, and the animator alike are all fed and driven by their knowledge of technology and its resulting power. Tapping into this intense and powerful creative zone of innovation is extremely beneficial and affirming for all who participate. I am living proof that expression through art promotes self empowerment and that knowledge of technology opens doors to several opportunities – both personally and professionally. All African-American students deserve the opportunity to tap into this knowledge and for its power to ring true throughout their educational pursuits as well. Notions of the digital divide, stereotype threat, and the achievement gap are all forces to be reckoned with once equal access to and successful use of technology become a reality.

How It All Started: My Own Educational Achievements

I have worked with computers and various forms of computer technology since I was in the 10th grade. Once I learned how to program a waterfall and watched it in action on a computer screen, my career path in computers began. I was 15. I initially wanted to create introductory animations for the HBO Network but

became a computer systems engineer and web developer instead. I was called by the power of knowledge and have been trying to answer that call ever since...

I have valued my own academic achievement since as long as I can remember. I was diagnosed with having dyslexia in kindergarten. My first grade teacher petitioned my mother to allow me to skip the second grade based on my math ability. She declined. By the time I reached the 6th grade, I was grouped with the "advanced placement" students and stayed with that group until I graduated from high school. I was one of only two black girls in this group most of the time. I never felt ashamed or ostracized (i.e. stereotype threat); in fact, I was extremely proud of myself for the accomplishment and felt worthy of this level of academic competition. As a matter of fact, I always sought to succeed in areas that were unexpected - from riding my bicycle on one wheel (a "wheelie") down the street for as long as the boys did in my neighborhood while growing up, to succeeding in the technology field today, a field where minorities are rare and minority women are scarce. As a result of my mother's encouragement to not only attend college, but graduate school as well, I grew up saying "I'm going to Howard University!"

I attended Howard University - for undergraduate and graduate school and I performed extremely well in both. I was named "most likely to succeed" by my freshman class and remained on the dean's list throughout. I graduated from college with honors and earned a cumulative 3.89 GPA in graduate school. While in graduate school, I volunteered as a tutor and computer teacher at a local community center called Martha's Table. It was then that I realized my aptitude for becoming an educator. I began to combine my love of children, technology, and art into a career path. Although unclear, the journey began!

Upon graduation, I started a nonprofit organization called Uplift, Inc. with the hopes and dreams of playing a positive role in the lives of children. Technology was a means to that end. I wanted to teach students about technology and influence

their lives in a positive way. *The mission of Uplift, Inc. is to provide educational and technology resources along with outlets for creative and self expression to underserved populations, based on community research, in order to develop life-long learners, strong individual citizens, and resilient neighborhoods and communities.*

Teaching

After receiving a BS in Computer Systems Engineering and a Masters in Computer Science, I returned to New Jersey where I soon became a certified K-8 general education teacher and taught computers at the first charter school in New Jersey, North Star Academy Charter School of Newark. I taught 5th-8th grade computer classes and occasionally served as a 9th grade substitute science teacher for three years. I witnessed and discussed with colleagues the many learning styles of African-American students – from the frequent and efficient use of chanting and singing to common visual and kinesthetic modes of absorbing content. I also realized that the most ‘challenging’ students (most of them boys) stayed in the computer labs during their free time – lunch, before school, after school, and the occasional attempt to remain there while “in trouble” with another teacher. It could have been my darling personality as a favored teacher, but I believe it was the exposure to the multi-sensory elements of technology ever present in the labs that kept these students coming back – from games to interactive typing instruction to their instructed knowledge of PowerPoint in computer class (a knowledge most students knew some of their teachers did not have).

Culturally Relevant Educational Media

These experiences ultimately fostered an interest in conducting research on how technology can be used to foster education and character development for African-American students and specifically led to a focus on the field of educational

media development. So, after learning about the Institute for Urban Education and Minority Achievement at the University of Maryland, I decided to apply and enroll in the doctoral program under the same name to learn more about the paradigms of urban culture, education, and pedagogy and discover through research, how to effectively apply technology to the education of African-American students.

It is my belief that my tenure at the University of Maryland and the study of a transformative agenda for black education will prove to be invaluable to this endeavor. In addition, my experience as a computer systems engineer and web developer combined with skills perfected as an Interactive Media Design major at the Arts Institute of Washington, positions me to create culturally relevant educational media that will effectively teach and empower African-American students specifically, and all students in general.