

Some Principles from Research on the Human Brain

- 1. “Wholes taught before parts are recalled better.** Our mind recalls best with context, a global understanding, and complete pictures to remember.” (Jensen, p.110)
- 2. “The brain seeks patterns--it is designed to perceive and generate patterns.** The patterns give context to information that otherwise would be dismissed as meaningless...” (Jensen, p.95 and Caine and Caine, p.89)
- 3. Novelty and Attention.** “...provide a rich balance of novelty and ritual. Novelty ensures attentional bias, and ritual ensures that there are predictable structures for low stress.” ...“The old notion about attention was get it and keep it. Today, you can have students’ attention 20-40- percent of the time and get terrific results. We know how to get attention: use contrast. In fact, nearly everything that is novel will garner attention; the contrast alone is enough.” (Jensen, pgs. 50-51)
- 4. The brain is a social brain.** “We have a brain-based drive to belong to a group and to relate to others. Hence educators need to support and consolidate social relationships and a sense of community.” (Caine and Caine, p.125)
- 5. We know that the arts can provide enrichment.** “Singing is good stimulation for the brain. Music researcher M. Kalmar found that music has many positive school correlates. ... the experimental group had better abstract conceptual thinking, stronger motor development, coordination, creativity, and verbal abilities.” (Jensen, p.38)
- 6. Movement and Learning.** “Today’s brain, mind, and body research established significant links between movement and learning. Educators ought to be purposeful about integrating movement activities into everyday learning.” (Jensen, p.88)
- 7. Emotions and Attention.** Emotions drive attention and create meaning, and You can’t get more related to learning than that. (Jensen, p.72) Emotions and cognition cannot be separated. Emotions are crucial to memory because they facilitate the storage and recall of information.” (Caine and Caine, p.82)

References: Eric Jensen, *Teaching with the Brain in Mind*. ASCD publishers. Caine R.N. and G. Caine, *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain*. Addison Wesley publishers.

Nine Recurring African American Cultural Themes

- 1. Spirituality** pervades the traditional African and African American ethos. It is based on the belief that all elements in the universe are of one substance (Spirit) and that all matter, animate or inanimate are merely different manifestations of the God force (Spirit).
- 2. Resilience** is the conscious need to bounce back from disappointment and disaster and to have the tools of humor and joy to renew life’s energy. Resilience is related to verve. Verve is desire for creative extemporaneousness—a sense of utter antipathy for the mundane and monotonous, the ability to focus on and handle several issues at once. The idea of transformation (the process of becoming better) is informed by two distinct yet interrelated ideas, verve and resilience.
- 3. Humanism** describes the African view of the whole world as vitalistic (alive) and this vitalism is grounded in a sense of goodness.
- 4. Communalism** denotes awareness of the interdependence of people. One acts in accordance with the notion that the duty to one’s family and social group is more important than individual privileges and rights.
- 5. Orality and Verbal Expressiveness** refers to the special importance attached to knowledge that is passed on through word of mouth and the cultivation of oral virtuosity.
- 6. Realness** refers to the need to face life the way it is without pretense. It is manifested by frankness of manner, casualness in social transactions, a contempt for artificiality and falseness in human conduct, and an aversion to formality and standardization.
- 7. Personal Style and Uniqueness** refers to the cultivation of a unique or distinctive personality or essence and putting one’s own brand on an activity. It implies approaching life as if it were an artistic endeavor.
- 8. Emotional Vitality** expresses a sense of aliveness, animation, and openness conveyed in the language, oral literature, song, dance, body language, folk poetry, and expressive thought.
- 9. Musicality/Rhythm** demonstrates the connectedness of movement, music, dance, percussiveness, and rhythm, personified through the musical beat. Also implied is a rhythmic orientation toward life. Rhythm, the fundamental principle of human behavior, reigns as the basic ingredient of African American expressiveness.

Boykin (1979, 1994), Nobles (1986a, 1990), Karenga (1986), Pasteur and Toldson (1982), Akbar (1976), Mbiti (1970, Asante (1987), Richards (1990), Dixon (1976), and White (1984)

Touching the Spirit®

African American Teaching and Learning Patterns
Applying Cultural Knowledge in the Achievement of Educational Excellence for African American Students

Ritual

(Affirmations/performances)

Rhythm

(In music, speech and movement)

Recitation

(Oral performance/memorization)

Repetition

(To enhance meaningfulness)

Relationships

(Relationships of love, respect, and belonging)

(Recognizing ties between humans and nature)

(Scientific study of patterns in nature and the phenomenal world)

(Making connections between school work and students’ life experiences)

Used Within a Context of *Nine Supportive Practices*

- 1) Expectations of Excellence
- 2) Continual Search for Patterns
- 3) Insistence on Working Toward Mastery
- 4) Teacher Modeling of Skills and Processes
- 5) Intensive Direct Instruction and Practice
- 6) Study of African and African American Philosophical Thought
- 7) Focus on Discourse, Inquiry, and Creative and Symbolic Thinking
- 8) Using Knowledge for Transformative Social Criticism and Community Action
- 9) In-Depth Study and Performance of African and African American Culture and Extensive Study of African and African American History.

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