

Reinventing ourselves: a conversation with Joyce E. King

Reinventando a nós mesmos: uma conversa com Joyce E. King

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A Professora Joyce E. King é uma importante pesquisadora do tema Black Education nos EUA, em sua vasta produção bibliográfica podemos destacar como grande contribuição à temática o livro *Black Education: a transformative research & action agenda for the new century*, organizado e editado por ela e publicado em 2005 por: AERA/Mahwah, de Washington, DC, e Lawrence Erlbaum, de Jew Jersey, EUA.

Atualmente Joyce é Professora na Georgia State University, EUA, no Departamento de Políticas Educacionais. De 2013 a 2014 presidiu a American Educational Research Association, fundada em 1916, a Associação dedica-se a provocar mudanças no processo educativo, incentivando a pesquisa acadêmica relacionada à educação e avaliação, promovendo a divulgação e aplicação prática dos resultados de investigação.

O texto apresentado a seguir reúne momentos de uma entrevista concedida pela professora ao Journal of the Rochester Teachers Association. A despeito de ter sido originalmente publicada em 1995, esta entrevista tem importante significado histórico, posto que naquela ocasião a professora discute, a partir de sua experiência como membro do State Curriculum Development

1 Realizou doutorado sanduíche sob a supervisão de Joyce E. King na Georgia State University que resultou na tese "A ascensão da diversidade nas políticas educacionais contemporâneas" em 2010.

and Supplemental Materials Commission, na Califórnia. Por esta razão, a tradução desta entrevista para a publicação que ora se apresenta pode servir tanto como registro de um importante balanço das pesquisas sobre multiculturalismo e currículo em diferentes países, quanto como fonte primária para aqueles que pesquisam os desafios de uma mudança curricular baseada na dimensão cultural da educação, na formação de professores e na inscrição da comunidade como agente dos princípios curriculares como propõe Joyce King.

Entrevistada:

Joyce E. King, PhD

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Author, **DYSCONSCIOUS RACISM, AFROCENTRIC PRAXIS and EDUCATION FOR HUMAN FREEDOM: THROUGH THE YEARS I KEEP ON TOILING**--Selected Works of Joyce E King. Routledge, 2015.

A entrevista foi conduzida pelo Dr. Susan Goodwin, Director of the Rochester, New York Teachers Center.

Partes da entrevista completa originalmente publicada em **Raising Standards**, Journal of the Rochester Teachers Association, Volume 3, Number 1, Spring/Summer, 1995.

GOODWIN: What concepts would you say need to be part a curriculum that seeks to teach for equity and democratic practice?

KING: Well, we certainly need to be able to focus attention on what gets defined as knowledge and how knowledge is produced, as

well as who is permitted to be involved in knowledge production. Whose experiences get included, for example, and from what perspective? If people can become more concerned and aware about this, then I think that we will have made some fundamental leaps in understanding from where we are now. I think it is important so that people can understand what the curriculum is actually doing. In California, we discovered that so-called multicultural social studies/history/textbooks can perpetuate racism by virtue of the concepts that are used to organize the knowledge that gets included, distorted, or even omitted. The United States is defined as a “nation of immigrants” in the California curriculum and textbooks, so African Americans become “forced immigrants” and Native Americans are the “first immigrants”. The goal was supposed to be multicultural inclusion. But we had to ask: From whose perspective? Thus, as ostensibly multicultural curriculum or text can itself be problematic if it is organized around faulty concepts. Then, we have, you know, the literature that identifies different kinds of multiculturalism, such as Jim Banks’ analysis of the levels of multicultural curriculum change. However, when a curriculum seeks to teach for equity and democratic practice, these two essential concepts in themselves can differentiate what problems mean when they speak of multiculturalism. Equity is a concept that you don’t necessarily find in a curriculum just because someone is talking about multicultural curriculum, and it is the same with democratic practice. Knowledge and knowledge production must be basic to the discussion about the curriculum and what it does. You asked some powerful questions earlier when we were talking about textbooks: “Where is this knowledge coming from, where is this voice coming from; who is speaking here? We need to be able to focus on what gets defined as knowledge, and this has to do with issues of power and control over the academic disciplines that produce and validate it in all areas. That

is why Black Studies emerged as a critique of ideological bias in mainstream knowledge...

GOODWIN: Or what counts as knowledge.

KING: What counts as knowledge, right. And also, what kinds of knowledge are we talking about? Are we talking about knowledge that validates various people's ways of knowing and being in the world, or are we still in a kind of singular mode of "This is knowledge", and beyond that other things don't count as knowledge? The concept of dysconsciousness has been helpful for me in my practice as a way to name the unfreedom of thought that exists as a result of curriculum that does not seek equity and democratic practice. Dysconsciousness has been an important concept that evolved out of my own search for ways to teach for equity and democratic practice. I have found that people were too willing to say, "Oh, racism is unconscious, or it's human nature and there is no possibility for change because that's just the way it is or that's the way it's Always been", or some other way of rationalizing people's inability to think outside existing paradigms and social categories.

GOODWIN: So there would have to be an understanding of dysconsciousness, dysconscious racism. There would have to be an understanding of that and a naming of that in order to move or even think that you could have an equitable or democratic practice.

KING: Right. And this dysconsciousness is one result of education that doesn't seek equity and democratic freedom. So dysconsciousness, you see, isn't the result of any kind of natural state of mind. It is the outcome of socialization and education for anti-equity and antidemocratic practice.

GOODWIN: That was clear.

KING: Another concept that I find importante in my own work is the perspective of alterity, which Sylvia Wynter has helped me understand. Understanding alterity is another importante goal, and I don't think is goint to be easy for some people to embrace, just like when we were explaining this morning about the distinction we make between Eurocentricity, Afrocentricity, and European or European American thought. We recognize, I think, a willingness to accept that multiple perspectives are importante. Then, however, we get to the problem of relativism, as in everything is everything and every perspective is fine, ans so there are those who just want to expand the canon to include as many perspectives as they can discover; to them, everything is everything. Wynter has developed the concepto f a perspective of alterity, which comes from the alter ego status of groups that are defined as inherently and even genetically outsid the social framework, or, as you put it, second class, never allowed to be normative. So for us, it happens to be , as African Americans we are the alter ego of the norm, that is, the socially constructed concept of "whiteness". And because we've been defined within the social framework as this alter ego, that gives us a particular perspective of critique that is not available to people who are defined as normative.

GOODWIN: When you think about the nature of state curriculum, textbooks, and the dominant perspectives that frame the curricula, how can educators avoid interpreting the lives of African peoples in inaccurate ways? I mean it becomes obvious to me that you have to take responsability for your own learning to some extent, the misrepresentation and inaccuracies are so pervasive and all-encompassing.

KING: Yes, some people have suggested that the concept of dysconsciousness lets folks off the hook, so to speak. But, it goes back to the issue of perspective. You said in the session earlier today how important content is, and it's true that we are benefiting from the new perspectives that Afrocentricity is bringing at this point in the same way that DuBois and others brought perspectives in their day. So it's not as though there is a standard body of literature that anybody can go to and say, "Well here is the corrective in case I got it wrong. Let me go look at this. "Because the new scholarship comes up, there's the reaction that denies its legitimacy. That came up in the session today, too. "Well, you've got this other perspective here, but where is the debate on it? Where is the scholarly critique?" That is one way to delegitimize the alterity perspective. You know...so if teachers rely on the textbooks, it is almost certain they will offer perspectives that are not helpful, accurate, and truthful. If they look for alternative sources of scholarship, they have to be able to critique the scholarship from the point of view of questions like: Whose interest does this knowledge or scholarship serve? And that's an educational process. It requires a kind of critical training, mental training in logic, ethics, and reflection that most people don't get, even to enable them to analyze commercials. Just your basic everyday citizenship skills. We're not educated in our own interest.

GOODWIN: Then the so-called scientific method or this idea of objectivity just serves as a screen because it keeps you from asking whose interests are served by this knowledge and who will be transformed by this knowledge, or who won't be?

KING: Right. And who will be served by it. There is a phrase from a South American scholar, Orlando Fals Borda. He calls this concept "the wig of neutrality and the mask of objectivity". In other words,

its not true at all. But there is an interest in maintaining this idea that place – or that there is some particular place to stand that reflects only neutrality.

GOODWIN: Your experience in California with the State Education Department around adoption of a social studies framework and a textbook series was related to these issues.

KING: It was gruesome.

GOODWIN: Yes, a battle.

KING: It almost killed me. I was sick for a year, longer than a yer, almost two years. I was in bed for a month. I had a mysterious ringing in my ears. I couldn't even stand up. We spent about \$ 2,000 in medical tests. I was going to resign from the Curriculum Comission because I was just the end. I couldn't take it any more. And a woman who had just come on the Comission called me to the side one day, and she said, "Please don't resign, because they said that if they can keep you away from the social studies book, that's what they really want. "So I said, I'll stay on". But to stay on them meant that I had to try to get the freedom to speak. So then it was ok. Once I decided to change the way I was operating, then I got better. I didn't have any more mysterious symptoms.

GOODWIN: Forged in the fire-in the flame.

KING: Well, I gained streghth as other people partipated in the struggle.

GOODWIN: Coming out of that experience, what are the lessons we could learn as educators?

KING: Well, you all did the same work here. New York tried to improve the curriculum first. The lessons happen as we try to change systems. We have to make informed decisions about where we are likely to have the most impact and the best results, given just our human physical endurance and spiritual energy. We do what will have some kind of impact. I think that when you are involved in change, you do those things that you are committed to, and yet you can't be guaranteed that what you are doing right at that moment will have the desired result right then. So it may be a process of education. It may be three or four years down the line when someone will recognize this and say, "Oh that's what that person was trying to accomplish", and someone else will then be able to pick up on that and do some other things. But it's not all-or-nothing proposition. People were educated at many different levels as a result of the struggle in California. Parent groups got organized and teachers and parents worked together. Communities created their own curriculum as a result of struggle, even if the State Department then maneuvered to keep their curricula from being used officially. So, serious change is a cycle. It goes back and forth. But for my own choice about where I would want to put my energy, I find it more rewarding to, as Mao said, "pull from both ends toward the middle" – to be able to see teachers and parents and students engaged in a mutual process of collaborative work, struggle, and understanding, even if they were using the textbooks that the state given them. You can teach critically from a bad book if you have some independent thought and some goals that are in your own interests. So I wouldn't want to say everything has to be directed toward undoing textbooks, but to create spaces for more people to participate in a conscious struggle toward some desirable ends. In California, people are revising the History-Social Science Framework again. There are some groups involved and participating in that revision

that were not a part of the original framework discussion. So they will add something. But the struggle has now moved to another level because the California process is providing direction for the National Curriculum Standards, tests, and assessments. It's as if we've got a moving target. That is part of the process; it's reality. First it was New York; four or five years ago, California- it was here, now it's over there. If we take California and what happened to California as a defeat, we won't see any possibility to do anything here. Now the stakes are even greater. But I think here is now a national conversation about some of the issues raised in NY and California that didn't exist when I was on the Curriculum Commission, and it is partly just a matter of time- you know, just the time of moving along with people doing different things. The struggle in NY happened, California's struggle happened, and that created all kinds of spaces that didn't exist for people to raise questions. But the power of systems is really great and we can't determine our effectiveness by how much we dismantle a particular system at a given moment in time. I would rather pay attention to the development of people as a lesson and as a criterion. You all are working here: you have a journal. People are working all over the country but we don't have the network that we need to stay informed and encouraged. It could be a computer network, it could be Rethinking Schools or some other kind of process to affirm those changes and to remember, "Oh yeah, this happened as a result of that", you know, rather than to just see it as if they won.

GOODWIN: How do you explain to people that the materials we are using or the methodology we have or the approach we are using with kids is not the best – that often it's counterproductive or obstructs consciousness? So often we're talking to people who don't really realize this until they have opportunities to critique and rethink. How do you explain to people the measure of texts,

materials, and methodologies that we use with kids and that are not productive has more to do with the underlying ideology rather than the particular focus, the particular discipline or subject matter? In this sense, a math book can be just as destructive or inaccurate as, say, a history book or a literature book.

KING: Well, I guess it is part of the larger question of how you explain any situation to people to get them motivated to care about it and to feel like it's something that affects them and something they need to be involved in. In this society that's very difficult because we're so conditioned to settle for less and to be involved in. In this society that's very difficult because we're so conditioned to settle for less and to be grateful that at least we have this or that in terms of material goods or jobs. With the textbooks, people were willing to say, "But these are so much better than the books we currently have". And they were, but they didn't meet the criteria that had been established by the state. So now you're in the middle of a process and you're saying, "But, I'm just going to settle for this. I know what the criteria say, but these books are so much better than before. So aren't you just being too extreme and too rigid? Why are you making trouble about this?" That attitude is pervasive about so many things, until you realize that we have to go to the root of the problem. Our ancestors used to say: You can hide the smoke but what you gon' do about the fire?" Some of us are only concerned if our own house is burning. Some of us are only concerned about symptoms like the smoke. But what about what caused the fire in the first place?

GODWIN: So then to teach for equity and democratic practice, you would have to teach community. You would have to teach collectiveness, you would have to teach about consensus.

KING: And group interests – not just “What’s in it for me?” And this also is not new. Grace Booggs has a very powerful analysis of this whole notion in an article she wrote in 1974 about “education to govern”. It is a philosophy for education and explains that education to govern is through self-definition and social responsibility that is tied to a transformed conception of society. It’s a holistic approach that links students and their learning to a diferente social vision. And certainly teachers are facilitators. But the community, with its needs and problems, also becomes the curriculum.

GOODWIN: I was going to add to that, how about education for leading?

KING: That’s perfectly undertood within this concept. What Boggs means by govern is self-government and self-determination-leading on behalf of one’s own interests, that is, for the benefit of the community rather than being swayed by the ideology of the “American Dream” and all of that hypocrisy.

GOODWIN: When you think about the interests of anyone who’s dispossessed or isn’t empowered for self-actualization, their interests are inherently diferente form someone who is empoweres or tends to think they are.

KING: Within an African-centered ethos of “I’m because we are”, self-actualization mus necessary be community actualization, and community actualization now requires us to study the community as well as our contente knowledge so that students are enable to use their knowledge on behalf of the community. What kind of jobs are going to be available in 20 years? What are the implications for access to the “information highway” for some but not for

all- prisons for the dispossessed rather than education to govern? We're headed toward a society tha is apartheid society in every respect except in name.

GOODWIN: In terms of your own research experiences and your familiarity with the work of other researchers, what kinds of research might teachers do that could be used in efforts to avoid the miseducation of students?

KING: I think this is really rich área. To see teachers as researchers is a very useful starting point that emphasizes the continous learning that has to go on, given the challhenges we are facing. I can give some examleas or research involving teachers as researchers that is now being done that I think representes some importante progress in this direction. For instance. Dr. Hassimi Maiga has introdued teachers here to go the Gao School Museum methodology that he developed in Gao, Mali (West Africa) when he was regional diretor (state superintendente) of education there. This is not a conventional "museum". It involves teachers and students in systematic collaborative research that produces a resource bank of culturally relavant teaching materials that make the curriculum more dynamic and relevant to the real needs of the students and the community. The teachers and students work together to identify and collect this repositior of School Museum materials for their classroom. First, the teachers analyze the curriculum to direct the students's study of the community and then, with the help of community people and parents, the students bring in items or make things that they will use to elaborate particular lessons, they may interview people or get involved in community servisse activities that can enhance instruction and make the curriculum more relevant to the needs of the community. I visited Saneye School in Gao and this kind of active learning guided by

teacher-directed inquiry that prepares students to be producers and not just consumers of knowledge was very impressive. But it comes from the teachers studying and analysing the curriculum to connect student with their own culture in ways that create a bridge for a more meaningful and relevant education. Dr. Maiga and I have been teaching the Gao School Museum approach in workshops for teachers here in the United States. In a book about Gao School Museum, Dr. Maiga says his work is “restoring a learning tradition”- Gao was both the cradle of the Songhay empire and the site of one of the ancient African universities that flourished there. That’s one example. Luis Moil and Norma Gonzalez and their colleagues in Arizona are also working toward curriculum change. They train teachers to go to the homes of their children to interview the families in order to discover the “funds of knowledge” that exist in that family and community. Funds of knowledge is an anthropological concept. If the father is a carpenter, what does he know as a result of his work that could enrich the curriculum? What knowledge does he have? If the mother is a candy maker and she’s doing a little side business selling candy, what is the fund of knowledge that exists in the household and in networks of households? The teachers are now collecting this information with the parents, and they translate that into classroom lessons that will help the students find meaning in their learning that extends their family experience. This research team has done some very interesting projects with family and classroom curriculum together that enhances student learning and teacher development. There are other examples, which I cite in the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*.

GOODWIN: In recent so-called multicultural literature anthologies, I have noticed the selections relevant to Indigenous people seem to be heavily connected to Indigenous cosmology

and philosophy. In terms of African people, these concepts are not presented. Because I'm aware of the similarities in the world view of African people and other people of color, I know that this represents a lost of opportunity for students to perceive and learn about the consistency in the world view of all people of color.

KING: Yes, it's consistency and it is also universality. That is, Eurocentricity has claimed universality for itself, and I think there is a tendency for us to shy away from that and to sort of be opposite. We're specific, we're particular. Nobody else like us. But, in fact, if you want to talk about original people or to go back to Kemet or the unifying principle of humanity, there's nothing inherently hegemonic about talking about a universal principle in which we participate. It's not inherently hegemonic. It's not about denying anybody else. It's about recognizing our uniqueness in our similarity with other people. The whole notion of African philosophy and cosmology is not omitted by accident, it's a strategic result for Eurocentric hegemony to deny certain forms of thought to African people – to say Africans have religions but not philosophy. That is no accident but a manifestation of European and Euro American cultural domination; it is the doctrine and methodology of white supremacy.

GOODWIN: This has served to keep people of color separated from each other in the minds of students when there is no real separation but rather basic agreement in terms of philosophy, cosmology and world view.

KING: It goes back to the alter-ego phenomenon, and it is the result of a historical process because some of the projection that was put into the dominant culture about African people really come about when there was agitation against the slave trade.

The assertion of African inferiority and human defectivity was a rationalization to support the continued enslavement of African people. It's not like it happened at one point in time; it happened as a built-up process, and it is still going on in the Bell Curve book, for example. Martin Bernal's book as far it goes, talks about that Molefi Kete Asante talks about that when he looks at history of European thought Yourugu Marinba Ani's book, talks about this process of claiming for one people rationality, or philosophy, and denying it for another. We are now trying to help humanity prepare for paradigm change. That's why I'm not depressed or sad. There are a lot of things that are really bad, but we have also built upon a lot of understanding and learning and what we need now is to be more effective in helping humanity prepare for another stage of development- another paradigm.

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