Instructional Technologies Designed by and for African Americans: An Examination of Several Works

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Abstract

African Americans have actively participated in creating instructional technologies to educate themselves throughout history. This research examines three instructional technologies made by and for African Americans using historical and critical discourse analysis; they include: 1866, The Freedman's Torchlight (a newspaper/textbook); 1920–1921, The Brownies' Book (a children's periodical); and 1977, Bridge: A Cross-Culture Reading Program (a reading curriculum). The findings extrapolated from the analyses reveal a treasure of cultural remnants. Cultural remnants are the racial, ethnic, linguistic, political, social, historical, educational and economic artifacts embedded in discourses. This research suggests that culture specific instructional technologies can be created effectively, and given the proper design specifications, they have the potential to improve the academic performance of learners.

When society has failed to properly educate black people, African Americans have created instructional products, using the available technologies, to better educate themselves. These instructional technologies exemplify products that are culture specific or specialized to a particular target audience. Therefore, these contributions to history should be documented in the fields of African American education and instructional technology. Instructional technology is a discipline concerned with the "theory and practice of design, development, utilization, management and evaluation of processes and resources for learning" (Seels & Richey's, 1994, p.1). This study focuses on those resources for learning. That is, it deals specifically with the classification of products as instructional technologies and how African Americans used the communications media of their time to create instructional technologies for better educating African American children and adults.

Past and present histories of instructional technology have excluded representations of African Americans as producers of instructional technologies. This omission is represented in key publications in the field (Jonassen, 2004; 1996; Reiser, 2001; Saettler, 1990) and continues to be a void or avoided in research journals, books and practitioner articles. This may seem insignificant for those who do not write or study in this area; however it is imperative that African American technological history be substantiated in the 21st century. Further, it is apparent that scholars must be diligent in documenting, researching, and publishing an African American version of this history.

This inquiry begins with a survey of instructional

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technologies created through print technology. Then, the path empirical analysis is laid out. Qualitative research methods require the identification of a "corpus of texts" meaning that in lieu of examining all instructional products, a representative sample can be chosen (Ryan and Bernard, 2000, p. 780). Therefore, a sampling of African American instructional technologies disclosed three representative products —1866, *The Freedman's Torchlight* [TFT] (a newspaper/textbook); 1920–1921, *The Brownies' Book* [TBB] (a children's periodical); and 1977, *Bridge: A cross-culture reading program* (a reading curriculum). The methods of analysis include historical analysis and critical discourse analysis, and these are further explained in the methodology section. The findings revealed a treasure of cultural remnants integrated within these instructional technologies. Cultural remnants are the racial, ethnic, linguistic, political, social, historical, educational and economic artifacts embedded in discourses.

This article is not meant to provide a comprehensive review of the empirical research but it highlights the data collection, analyses, findings and conclusions. More comprehensive analyses of the empirical data can be found in Young, in press-a, 1999, and 2001.

Instructional technologies, 1812–1938

Throughout history, instructional technologies have been created using many forms of communications media such as the printing press, film, radio, television, video, audiotape, computers and so forth. This survey focuses only on print technology. Instructional technologies created from 1812–1938, relied mostly on print technology and were produced in a variety of formats such as readers, autobiographies, biographies, school curriculums, addresses, petitions, poetry, nonfiction, fiction, and newspapers. These instructional technologies offered instructional content and sought to reach a Black audience; these examples support this contention. In 1812, Paul Cuffe wrote the petition *A brief account of the settlement and present situation of the colony of Sierra Leone, in Africa*. In this petition, Cuffe addresses free Africans and other people of color to inform them about the growing settlement of whites and free blacks from North America in Sierra Leone (Cuffe, 1812). *Freedom's Journal*, the first black newspaper published in 1827, sparked another channel for the education and communication of black people. Its editors Samuel Eli Cornish and John Brown Russwurm believed the newspaper served as a "channel of commu-

nication" between the editors and the public (*Freedom's Journal*, 1827, Vol.1 No.1, p. 4). William Still, in the 1872 book, *The underground railroad,* chronicles the narratives of enslaved Blacks that he aided to freedom. Stills' dedication in this manuscript exemplifies the audience he sought to reach; it read as follows: "friends of freedom, to heroic fugitives and their posterity in the United States, these memorials of their love of liberty are inscribed" (Still, 1872). In 1889, Reverend Daniel A. Payne, wrote *A treatise on domestic education* that provided Christian tenants for raising children that fathers and mothers of all races could use in their homes (Payne, 1889). Majors wrote an anthology of biographies about black women entitled *Noted negro women* in 1893 with the specific intention of appealing to black people, as noted, throughout this manuscript (Majors, 1893). By the 1900s, more examples of instructional technologies for schooling emerged. Silas X. Floyd in 1905, wrote *Floyd's flowers or duty and beauty for colored children*; this book contained one hundred short stories with many characters that depicted black people (Floyd, 1905). A unique school text published in 1931 and written by Otelia Cromwell, Lorenzo Dow Turner and Eva B. Dykes was *Readings from Negro authors for schools and colleges*; this anthology focused on literature written by Black authors (Cromwell, Turner & Dykes, 1931).

This brief survey suggests that the creation of instructional technologies for African Americans has been prevalent for some time and that these instructional technologies may have been designed out of necessity versus market demands. It is apparent that these instructional technologies began to fill an educational, communication and cultural void. These products also demonstrate that it is possible to design with the culture of a target audience as the main focus of a products development. This has implications for creating contemporary culture specific instructional technologies (Young, 2008; in press-b).

Methods

Presented here is an overview of the data collection, analysis and findings of TFT, TBB and Bridge. The goal of this analysis was to reveal how the cultural remnants evolved from the data.

Data Collection & Analysis

TFT, TBB, and Bridge were selected based on their

historical significance, cultural identification with the target audience, designer's classification that the product's purpose was instructional, and the designers use of communications media. The three important periods in African American history that provide a historical background consisted of Reconstruction, The Harlem Renaissance and The Post Civil Rights Years.

The original questions of this research included:

- How do instructional products disclose their nature?

- What features of these designs can be used in creating contemporary instructional products?

These products were analyzed using two qualitative research methods – historical analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). A historical analysis examines social occurrences in "historical contexts", and this analysis can include the exploration of historical documents and records such as diaries, newspapers, or novels (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 375). Consistent with Wodak's (2002) discourse historical approach, the historical context becomes integral to the examination and explanation. CDA allows for an in-depth analysis of oral stories and printed texts that are culturally influential to society (Huckin, 1995; Wodak, 2002).

The instructional products received a text and context analysis. The text analysis examined the areas of genre, framing, omission, backgrounding, foregrounding and visual representations (Huckin, 1995). This type of text analysis provides an outline of the product; it is a broad analysis based on readily accessible information in the text. The context analysis identifies the social, political (vanDijk, 1993), or economic occurrences within the text; this analysis parallels macro or societal issues with micro or product issues.

Vygotsky (1978) theorized that to encompass in research the process of a given thing's development in all its phases and changes—from birth to death—fundamentally means to discover its nature, its essence, for "it is only in movement that a body shows what it is" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 65). This research initially sought to understand the nature of culture based instructional products at critical moments in US history; thereby aligning itself with Vygotsky's theory. That is, studying chronologically instructional technologies made by and for African Americans would reveal their nature.

Fostering culture and learning

The findings indicated that the instructional technologies disclosed their nature through a methodical analysis of the designer's ideologies, historical analyses of the time period, and a text and context analysis. This section provides three examples from the findings of TFT, TBB and Bridge. The analyses of TFT, TBB and Bridge revealed cultural remnants embedded in the instructional technologies. The cultural remnants contained the ideas, themes and concepts most prevalent throughout the analysis.

The Freedman's Torchlight

Reconstruction (1865–1877) served as the period in history where TFT was created. It was a time where 3.5 million enslaved Blacks were emancipated and left to educate, feed, shelter, and clothe themselves. Therefore, a holistic type of education, an education that involved the acquisition of knowledge about employment, laws, schooling, and other issues were imperative to the survival of black people (Ihle, 1990; Webber, 1978; Whiteaker, 1990). A variety of resources specific to this period in history formed the historical analysis.

TFT was considered one of the earliest educational periodicals produced by and for Blacks (Bullock, 1971); it has been classified as a newspaper textbook (Morris, 1980). In 1866, The African Civilization Society (ACS) published TFT in Brooklyn, New York (ACS, 1866). The ACS was "an organization officered and managed entirely by colored men" (ACS, 1866, p. 2). Black ministers formed the membership of the organization; they came from churches of varied denominations such as African Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Episcopal, Methodist, and Presbyterian. Three participated as editors of TFT, Rufus L. Perry (editor) and associate editors, Amos N. Freeman and Henry M. Wilson (Morris, 1980). These men were ministers and educators of religious and elementary instruction. Their goals for freed Blacks were to instill the concepts of self-help and pride in one's race (Morris, 1980; Richardson, 1986).

This example demonstrates how TFT contained cultural remnants consistent with the context analysis. In the thematic section *Academic Lessons* (see Table 1), the designers of TFT chose to foster culture and learning through instruction that was meant to enculturate freed Blacks into the American culture. (It should be noted that prior to 1866 enslaved Blacks were not allowed to read or write as mandated by the laws of

slavery). TFT exemplifies how a community of people appropriated print technology to educate themselves (Eglash, 2004).

TFT contained academic lessons with a Christian slant that offered readers self empowerment and self elevation. The curriculum was not vocational or agricultural thereby implying that freed Blacks should just seek manual labor positions. The designers of TFT offered a classical elementary or basic adult education curriculum conducive to progressing forward in an academic line of study.

The short lessons covered a variety of subjects. Christian tenants were infused throughout, that spoke to human's relationship to God and the purpose of the bible. The language arts included lessons in reading and writing. Reading instruction consisted of the alphabets, phonics, vowels, consonants, words, etymology, spelling, and the practice of reading. Writing focused on handwriting in print and script. Other aspects of the elementary curriculum covered subjects such as arithmetic, geography, history, grammar, and social studies. This curriculum parallels that of an elementary school.

Mastering this curriculum could give freed Blacks the basic reading and writing tools for their daily survival. Being able to read, for many freed Blacks, could have been a self empowering and self elevating experience because access to literacy had been denied their entire lives.

Embedded in spelling and reading lessons #3 and #4 are ACS's beliefs, values and agenda. In spelling lesson #3, the words are listed as follows:

free	life	live	lives	took	love
love	man	now	will	thank	God
work	hard	good	house		
right	learn	land	made	free	slaves
stand	God	should	ought	serve	read
stand	union	ever	now	and	

(*ACS*, 1866, p. 1)

Collectively, what appears to be a list of spelling words are the editor's social, political and religious ideologies for freed Blacks. Freed Blacks are "free" to "live" "life," "love," "read," "work," and "serve" "God." A "man" has a "right" to be "free." "Thank" the "union" "and" "thank" "God." By learning these words, freed Blacks could begin to read sentences, paragraphs, and eventually pages of text. Spelling lesson #3 illustrates the instructional strategy of learning a word in isolation; the next example demonstrates reading in context.

I am free and well. I will love God and thank him for it. and I must work hard and be good and get me a house and lot. (*ACS*, 1866, Lesson 4, p.1)

In 1866, typical school texts included Christian tenants and academics. Similarly, TFT mirrored the classical elementary curriculum. In lesson 4, this paragraph again carried a social, economic and religious message. Socially, freed Blacks were free to migrate, find work and build a life. The economic implications were that freed Blacks could find work to support a family, purchase land and buy a house. Freed Blacks owed their freedom to God and should remain eternally thankful and pious.

These lessons may have served to continue to subjugate Blacks in terms of freedom of thought and behavior; however the lessons served an educational purpose. Specifically, the use of repetition of ideas and words is a basic pedagogical strategy and frequents many contemporary instructional products. The words in isolation resemble a list of high frequency words as many of them are one syllable words. The cultural remnants, found in this example of TFT, include those listed under Academic Lessons in Table 1. On the left side of the table are the categories of organization; the right side displays the ideas, themes and concepts that became the cultural remnants embedded in TFT.

Table 1. The Freedman's Torchlight - Context Analysis

Categories of Organization	Ideas, Themes & Concepts
Designers for the People	
	self help, racial pride, supporting black people & progress, self elevation, self identification, self empowerment, racial identification, cultural identification, community supported, developed by a community of designers, designers from the educated class, the need to organize as a people, incorporated organization, parents/gardians supporting children, ehtnically based educators (e.g., by blacks for blacks), religious affiliated (designers) or people with a social mission, educaated class should educate the masses, leaders with the interests of the community (social, political, economic), racial and cultural identification assists in the transference of knowledge, tying ones racial and cultural heritage to ones learning, Race Based Thinking [children can learn about identity, culture, race and how their people are viewed in the American society from one of his own], Positive Enculturation [educate by and for with "equal skill less money and offer a positive enculturation"]
Academic Lessons	Christianity; classical elementary curriculum; goal to teach the learner how to read; repetition of ideas & words; academic achievement; Christian slant offered its readers self empowerment, elevation and identification; challenged "contemporary or mainstream" curriculum and subjugating laws
Sociopolitical Actions	freedom of mind, conforming to the dominant culture, literature (poetry), need for blacks to work, educate themselves and define the fate of their emancipation
Financial Stability	financially under prepared, promoted idea of economic stability, promoted and documented black economic progress; self reliance
Religious Instruction	faith, Christianity, repetition of Christian tenets

The Brownies' Book

The Harlem Renaissance (1920s–1930s) was a period of cultural growth where artists and writers shared and developed their talents; this period served as the background for TBB. Specifically, *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* an adult newspaper/magazine, provided information into middle class African American lifestyle from 1920–1921. The historical overview was composed of news from *The Crisis* and other sources to describe this period in history.

TBB was published, from January 1920 to December 1921, as a monthly children's periodical. The magazine was divided into departments that included:

The Judge, The Jury, Playtime, As The Crow Flies, Little People of the Month, Playtime and *The Grown-Ups Corner.* William Edward Burghardt DuBois produced TBB and *The Crisis.* Augustus Granville Dill held the position of business manager, and Jessie Redmon Fauset was the literary editor. DuBois, Dill, and Fauset were educators at some time in their lives (DuBois, 1913). Their vision was to educate people for the life ahead of them; black people needed to know about the ways of the world, black culture, black identity and black life.

This example of Visual Representations demonstrates how TBB contained cultural remnants consistent with the text analysis (See Table 2). Visual representations frame the product (Fairclough, 1995) and consist

of diagrams, graphics, icons, sketches, text, tables, and so forth. In TBB, visual representations took the form of sketches, photographs, illustrations and text. Photographs were in black and white and some had a copper tint. Other photographs covered 8 to 10 pages

visual representations (i.e., photographs of Black people and the layout of the newspaper) (See Table 2). On the left side of the table are the areas of analysis; the right side displays the ideas, themes and concepts that became the cultural remnants embedded in TBB.

Table 2. The Brownies' Book - Text Analysis

Areas of Analysis	Ideas, Themes & Concepts
Framing	-created by college educated blacks -founded on black culture based ideologies -for black children -DuBois wanted to teach: universal love and brotherhood. -DuBois believed "Education must teach life" — theme throughout context analysis -Mission: entertain & teach — self love, racial identity, black history, race pride, character, conscience, happiness, love, self- sacrifice
Omission & Backgrounding	opposing points of view to the publication
Foregrounding	
Emphasized	photographs of black men, women and children
De-emphasized	written text
Visual Representations	photographs of black people -layout (positioning of materials on page)

per issue. The photography included many pictures of children, headshots of high school/college graduates and sociopolitical images. Illustrations were sketches or more elaborate illustrations contained bold colors like red, green or blue. Throughout, text received different fonts, font sizes and positions on the printed page.

Visual representations assist in the framing of text (Fairclough, 1995; Huckin, 1995), and the design of text aids in comprehending its meaning (Purves, 1998). DuBois encouraged the use of visual images in his books, newspapers, and magazines. He provided a balanced portrait of Black people through these visual representations. In 1910, it was rare to see any image of Black people in the media, DuBois chose photography and print technology to convey his message. Black newspapers seldom used photography and White papers never did (DuBois, 1940). The cultural remnants, found in this example of TBB, included those listed under

Bridge: A cross-culture reading program

The early post Civil Rights years (1965–1979) were a time where African Americans continued to fight for equality and justice, and these factors were exhibited in instructional innovations like Bridge. Situated in the time of President Lyndon B. Johnson's political agenda of "War on Poverty," and "The Coleman Report," that sought to find out why African American children were not achieving academically (Levine, 1996), Bridge was to balance the disequilibrium that plagued language learning for the African American student. As an intervention reading program, Bridge hoped to improve the reading levels of black junior and senior high school students in America's public schools. The program was normed for inner city black students in grades 7–12 who were reading between 2nd and 4th grade levels. The designers included Gary A. Simpkins a psychologist

and educator, Charlesetta Stalling (formerly Charlesetta Simpkins), a reading specialist, and Grace Holt, a linguist. Bridge answered the call to assist in the education of inner city black children (Simpkins, 2002; 1977). The designers created a skills based reading program that included a linguistic and cultural context and participatory activities. This reading curriculum sought to empower students, support their language, maintain their culture, and teach them how to read.

Reading Booklet 4 demonstrated how Bridge contained cultural remnants consistent with the context analysis (See Table 3). There were four stories in Book One each written in Black Vernacular; Black Vernacular is also known as Black English or Ebonics. Black Vernacular is a dialect of American English, and it is spoken by many African Americans. The reading booklets were also written in Standard English and Transition. Transition means that a story was written in Black Vernacular and Standard English (Simpkins et al., 1977). The booklets included *Shine, Stagolee, The organizer,* and *The ghost. Shine, Stagolee* and *The ghost* were based on black folklore. The black folklore used in Bridge is known as "oral epic poetry" or "toasts." This collection of folklore exemplifies African folklore meshing with the New World, the slavery experience, "the aftermath of slavery," and the "urbanization" of black people (Simpkins, 1976, p. 138). Smitherman (1977) defines toasts as "a variation on the trickster, bad nigguh theme done in poetic form" (p. 157).

In the story *Shine*, Shine was a black man and a stoker on a ship called the Titanic. As a stoker, he shoveled coal into the ships furnace. Shine warned the captain several times that the ship was sinking. However, the captain refused to listen, and the ship began to sink. Shine jumped off the boat and saved himself. From the deck, passengers begged Shine to save them; however Shine was the only survivor. The audio taped instructions to *Shine* started with this introduction:

> This story come from Black folklore, you understand. Black folklore is stories that Black folk have told and sung for a whole lot of years. This here story is all about Shine, a strong Black man! Maybe you heard other stories about Shine. Now come here and check out mine. (Simpkins et al., 1977, p.1)

The introduction and the story were written in Black Vernacular and included idiomatic expressions used in some black communities. For example, the story read:

> You ever hear of the *Titanic?* Yeah, that's right. It was one of them big ships. The kind they call a ocean liner. Now this here ship was the biggest and the baddest ship ever to sail the sea. You understand? It was suppose to be unsinkable. Wind, storm, ice-berg — nothing could get next to it. It was a superbad ship, the meanest thing on the water. It could move like four Bloods in tennis shoes. It was out of sight!
>
> But you know what? The very first time this here ship put out to sea, it got sunk. Can you get ready for that? On its first trip, this here bad, superbad ship got sunk. Now ain't that something?
>
> Well, anyway, this here bad, superbad ship went under. Word was, there was very few survivors. Just about everybody got drown. But quiet as it's kept, they say that the one dude who got away was a Blood. Yeah, can you get ready for that? He was a big, Black strong Brother by the name of Shine. (Simpkins et al., 1977, pp. 2–3)

Shine fits Smitherman's (1977) definition of a toast with a "bad nigguh theme done in poetic form" (p. 157). Shine is so "bad" (meaning good in Black Vernacular) that he is the only person to survive the sinking of the Titanic. He is so smart; he is "superbad."

The idiomatic expressions evident in *Shine* include phrases such as: "blood," "superbad," and, "out of sight." These expressions emulate those spoken in the 1970s by many black people. The manipulation and re-creation of language is an inherent part of black people's linguistic and cultural experience, and this example accurately depicts that language. The cultural remnants found in Bridge included: black characters, black folklore, literature, focus on linguistic and cultural expression, idiomatic expressions and language used in the 1970s. These cultural remnants are represented in Table 3-Reading Booklets (One through Five). On the left side of the table are the categories of organization; the right side displays the ideas, themes and concepts that became the cultural remnants embedded in Bridge.

Table 3. Bridge: A Cross-Culture Reading Program - Context Analysis

Categories of Organization	Ideas, Themes & Concepts
Reading Booklets (One through Five)	black characters; black folklore also called toasts or oral epics; literature (fiction); idiomatic expressions used in some black communities; black cultural traditions are expressed in the stories; humor represented in each story to entertain the reader; use of language from the 1970s (e.g., hip you to that, you dig); focus on linguistic and cultural expression; bridging children from BE to SE; stories provided authentic representations of Black English, black life and black culture. Cultural Themes in the stories examined black life in all its forms such as: inner city living, street talk (e.g., slang, black idiomatic expression), culture (e.g., vibration cooking, black greetings), social and cultural stigmas (e.g., kinky hair, speaking BE, not knowing how to read), responsibility to family, economic realities for low income black families, and the lives of black people in their communities
Study Books 1–5 Activities	story directions are written to appeal to students culturally and socially; student's schema (prior knowledge) and language is valued, respected and acknowledged
Story Questions	BE not legitimate in instructional products, however it is acknowledged as a literary form
Skills Lesson	written in dialect (Black English, Transition, and Standard English); reteaching; extending & refining reading skills in all dialects; provide more time to students during the searching process; allow students to relearn how to read in a supportive social environment; support students where they are; provide a supportive learning environment; repetition of the language, culture, and norms of an inner city black community
Word Bridging	provide opportunities for students to improve their vocabulary; synonym recognition through word usage and meaning in SE and BE
Feedback Records	provide students with an individualized self assessment; students compete with themselves versus other students

Interpretation and Implications

The cultural remnants found in TFT, TBB and Bridge reveal how culture is embedded in the text, context, history and designers ideologies. TFT, TBB and Bridge focused on racial support through the acquisition of knowledge. They promoted education and the intellectual development of black people. TFT, TBB and Bridge found enculturation possible through the acquisition of reading, writing and religion (TFT); middle class values, ideals and worldly knowledge (TBB); and knowing ones own cultural and linguistic norms and that of the dominant culture (Bridge). The cultural remnants revealed the pieces of culture embedded in the instructional technologies and provided signs for how to design contemporary products that are culture specific (Young, in press-b).

Concluding Thoughts

The tradition of designing and educating by and for African Americans has a long history. Although some histories of instructional technology exclude references to African Americans as producers of instructional technologies (Jonassen, 2004; 1996; Saettler, 1990), these stories do not have to be lost forever. These examples

demonstrate the cultural and technological ingenuity needed to create culture specific instructional technologies. The demands for such products are usually silent or silenced; however the need is always there. Field tests of Bridge in 1977 revealed that learners who received this instruction made higher gains in reading; in all cases, students scored 5 points and above over the control group (Simpkins, 1976; 2002). This research suggests that culture specific instructional technologies can be created effectively, and given the proper design specifications, they have the potential to improve the academic performance of learners.

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