

**Negotiating Cultural Identity through
the Arts: The African Cultural Memory
Youth Arts Festival (ACMYAF)**

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work, which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

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Abstract

Negotiating Cultural Identity through the Arts: The African Cultural Memory Youth Arts Festival (ACMYAF) examines ways in which African cultural memory, and the extent to which the arts based approaches benefited the cultural identity socialisation experiences of young people of African migrant descent. Arts were used to explore the identities of a group of youth of African descent, as a means to developing understanding of the issues relating to their bicultural socialisation and ways in which Arts-based strategies could be used to address them towards bicultural competence. Bicultural competence implies the ability to function successfully in both the dominant and subordinate culture.

The research project was motivated by the fact that Australian youth of African descent experience psycho-social challenges to their cultural identity development. Quite often this includes a denigration of their African cultures and identities through monocultural and exclusive cultural practises of Eurocentric Australia. And yet the young people involved in this study carry with them embodied knowledge and memories from African culture acquired through cultural socialisation prior to arrival in Australia as well as in 'African' homes in Australia, through parental cultural education and transmission. Such knowledge and cultural values play a significant role in identity formation and self-concept of the African descendant youth in Australia.

Accordingly the festival was organised as an aesthetic and educative theatrical event using the Ujamaa circle and the African centred pedagogy theory, Participatory action research and Performance as a research Inquiry for the project. A participatory approach, through educative dialogue and performance

enabled the participants to reveal their own embodied knowledge about African cultural memory leading to an educative exploration of its relevance through theatrical events. The process also enabled the participants to recall and document their cultural memories and subsequently reflect on their significance to identity negotiation and construction. The methodological research process became a Bicultural Socialisation Education Program (BSEP) because it enabled the participants through the theatrical events to integrate both subordinate and dominant cultural ideas towards self-affirming epistemologies and achieve a positive self-concept of themselves.

It is the study's conclusion that the festival, as a third space, enabled the participants to explore African cultural memory educatively by enacting art forms and dialogue that informed their African Australian identities. Furthermore, the methodological approach enabled the participants to reveal factors that influenced their bicultural socialisation experience, namely: visibility, racism, criminal stereotyping, alienation and specific issues relating to intergenerational relations. These factors present ongoing psycho-social challenges to the participants and in turn influence their bicultural socialisation experience and self-concept.

The methodological approach was effective in enabling the participants, as a group of diverse African identities to develop an African Australian sensibility and to become conscious of their own agency in mobilising African cultural memory in an Australian context, towards bicultural competence.



**‘Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi’
‘It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten’**

Keywords

African; African Centred; African Australian; Alienation; Bicultural Competence; Bicultural Socialisation; Ujamaa Circle; Critical Pedagogy; Cultural Literacy; Cultural Memory; Cultural Democracy; Cultural Identity; Dominant; Diaspora; Ethnicity; Festival; Marginalisation; Migrant; Multiculturalism; Participatory; Performance; Politics; Racism; Refugee; Subordinate; Third Space; Youth; Young People.

Acknowledgements and Dedications

The thesis project was a community based festival involving twelve young people of African descent, five patrons, two community artists and the researcher as the facilitator and cultural translator. I therefore wish to extend my sincere thanks to the young people involved in the project for trusting the process, sharing their stories, and creative imagination that culminated into an informative and educative festival. I also wish to thank the patrons for sparing their time to support the project, and the artists for playing an important role in facilitating some of the sessions towards informative performances.

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List of Acronym

ACL	African Cultural Literacy
ACM	African Cultural Memory
ACMYAF	African Cultural Memory Arts Festival
ADY	African Descendant Youth
BSEP	Bicultural Socialisation Educational Program
CAPT	Critical African Centred Pedagogy
EC	Elimu circle
PC	Patron Committee
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PaRI	Performance as Research Inquiry
RVJ	Reflective Visual Journal
UC	Ujamaa circle

Glossary of key African-source terms

Ajabu	to be surprised; to wonder
Ata demba satwihula	Keep working at it; do not give up easily
Baraka	Blessing(s); prosperity; abundance
Elimu	Knowledge; education; science
Mungu	God
Sankofa	Return to the source
Uhuru	Freedom; independence
Ujamaa	Family ties; relationship; brotherhood/ sisterhood