Education for Information -1 (2024) 1–13 1
DOI 10.3233/EFI-240089
IOS Press
CORRECTED PROOF

Curbside pedagogy: Bringing glocal black curricula to the streets

Jess Reed
Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, USA
E-mail: reedjes3@msu.edu

For over five years, Chrissy has developed and facilitated "Morals + Murals Hood Tours" of North and West Philadelphia that revere Black and local counter-narratives. In her presence, I was entrusted with such stories that I otherwise could not access. Since then, 2021, I have returned to Philadelphia (Philly) and taken Black-led tours in other locations. While in New Orleans, I learned from Mama Vera. In my hometown, Detroit, I finally met Baba Jamon Jordan during the Black Scroll Network History and Tour. Most recently, I took a solo trip to Portugal, where I learned from Naky during the African Lisbon Tour. My experiences with Chrissy, Mama Vera, Baba Jamon, and Naky, inspire me to question: How do Black storytellers honor, imagine, and amplify Black curricula, revelatory counter-narratives, and possibilities via curated city-based "street" tours? In doing so, how do they participate in glocal (simultaneously local and global) conversations that speak back to anti-Blackness. These wonderings frame my conceptualizing of curbside pedagogy (CP). Through witnessing, I have noticed these elements of CP:

- Hearing One's Own Voice
- Summoning Responsibility & Resistance
- Grief and Healing
- Volume (Space-Making and Space-Taking)
- Ujamaa
- Decolonial Cartographies
- Glocal Black Curricula

Keywords: Curriculum, education, Black, glocal, global, local, pedagogy, diaspora, praxis, scholarship

1. Introduction

> My experience of education, from kindergarten to graduate school, was one of coping with someone else's agenda, curriculum, and pedagogy, someone who was neither interested in my well being as a kwezens, nor interested in my connection to my homeland, my language or history, nor my Nishnaabeg intelligence. No one ever asked me what I was interested in nor did they ask for my consent to participate in their system (Simpson, 2014, p. 6).

Since 2021, I have opted and been invited into Black storytelling across cities in four continents: Africa, Europe, North America, and South America. Many of these experiences occurred during my solo travels, for which I hungered to hear, in real-time, local Black voices and perspectives on places visited. Within the structure of advertised tours, I also met fellow travelers (mostly Black) who had varied journeys, yet shared hopes for intentional and Black authored, place-based learning. The tour

guides, or more precisely, educators and pedagogues, left me feeling visceral gratitude which became evident in my conscious breath, emotionality, and increasing physical comfort while occupying space with relative strangers. These tours cemented that, while traveling, I could feel at home inside a 'glocal' (simultaneously local and global) Blackness which encompasses radical, educative, and kinetic stories. Such stories – passionately researched, lived by racialized Black people, disseminated on sidewalks and city squares, and remembered through photographs and lifelong conversations – undergird the construction and deconstruction of often taken for granted landmarks, street signs, apartment complexes, pavements, and other structures. In these contexts, glocal Black community is, thus, operationalized through tour educators' invitations to visitors/travelers and local residents; their disruptive and imaginative research, pedagogy, and counter-storytelling; relationship-building and space-making among tour participants; the endurance of stories via knowledge from tours being passed on; tour educators' calls-to-action to disrupt settler-colonial relationships to land and erasures of Black stories from dominant and "official" local narratives; and the rendering visible of threads and resistances across Black experiences in diasporic geographies.

"Glocal" has been understood as describing complex, non-binary, and mutually shaping inner workings between global and local factors (Robertson, 1995). To further make sense of this concept, Sarroub (2008) explains, "Glocalization thus describes how people relate linguistically, culturally, and cognitively to one another and to the institutions they inhabit in times of change" (p. 61). This definition emphasizes the centrality of people's relationships and how they process their encounters in sociopolitical contexts. Pertaining to Blackness, glocal sense-making can support Black people's languaging of anti-Blackness as a global force that weaponizes in locally specific ways. BlackCrit, for instance, is a particularized derivative of critical race theory, that recognizes the "nowhere-ness but wherever-ness of the Negro as non-human" (Busey & Dowie-Chinn, 2021, p. 154). In tandem with anti-Blackness, Blackness is a 'glocal' connective framework, generating counter-narratives and transnational possibilities. An example is found in hip hop, with which Alim & Pennycook (2007) explore how "artists emphasize very local expressions of global theories of racialized oppression" (p. 94).

I situate 'glocal' as a consciousness that can be Black, communal, and activating (epistemologically, relationally, and politically). I draw connections to Katherine McKittrick's (2011) analysis on Black people and place. She notes, "... that which 'structures' a black sense of place are the knotted diasporic tenets of coloniality, dehumanization, and resistance" (p. 949). Human trafficking, through transatlantic enslavement, forced enslaved Africans' centuries-long labor on stolen indigenous land. Yet, it could not eradicate Black people's resistant practices of self and community preservation (assertions of wholeness and personhood) and creation of "alternative mapping practices" in spite of white supremacist displacement (p. 949). Like McKittrick, Alves (2012) understands Blackness as being locationally conscious. He also believes that Blackness is embodied and made borderless (p. 52) through global experiences of anti-Blackness and transnational, diasporic political potential.

With this essay, I conceptualize and celebrate curbside pedagogy as an enactment and activation of glocal Black community consciousness. I particularly center two questions:

- How do Black storytellers honor, imagine, and amplify Black curricula, revelatory counter-narratives, and possibilities via curated city-based "street" tours?
- In doing so, how do they participate in glocal (simultaneously local and global) conversations that speak back to anti-Blackness?

As a bridge to illustrating these inquiries, I offer some historical context on Black heritage tourism education. Through prose and poetry, I then invite you to envision what it was like for me, a Black girlhood scholar, educational researcher, listener, traveler, walker, and learner, to feel confidently un-alone while being called into disruptive, expansive, and unapologetically Black storytelling as curricula. Ultimately, I hope for you to imagine curricula and pedagogy that disrupts and thrives outside the state-surveilled school classroom. May you consider how such decolonial pedagogy and praxis names racism and anti-Blackness, nuances Blackness, relies on participants' agentic decisions, and digs up buried narratives.

2. A historical snapshot of Black heritage tourism education

Several scholars note an undeniable link between cities' Black heritage tourism and governments' globalized economic motives. Grant (2005) describes how post-industrial Philadelphia (Philly) marketed itself as "colonial America's busiest and richest seaport" (p. 852), selling national heritage as a product. At the time of the article, Philly's Black heritage offerings (facilitated through Black cultural festivals, tour groups, museums, etc.) were more concentrated in the downtown, Center City area and mainstream historical sites. Grant additionally notes that Black travelers and Philly locals exercised economic agency regarding tourism. Black heritage experiences increasingly became prerequisites for travelers choosing Philly as a leisure or conference destination. Locals, knowing the city's priority of heritage tourism, continued advocating for more heritage investment in neighborhoods like North Philly.

Assessing Black tourism in Salvador, Bahia, Calvo-González and Duccini (2010) discuss how the Brazilian government regarded post-emancipation Blackness/Africanness in the country as problematic and incommensurable with modernity. Yet, starting in the 1930s, the government began considering local expressions of Blackness in Brazil as externally interesting and, thus, economically profitable (for international and domestic tourism). Over time, the country incorporated Afro-Brazilian cultural practices, like capoeira, into its narrative of an authentic, particularized national identity (p. 140). Also emphasizing the power of narratives, Thomas (2009) centers her hometown, post-Katrina New Orleans. She remarks on endorsed anti-Blackness, evidenced by a:

> predominant tourism narrative, one that exalts the city's European heritage at

> the expense of its African one, that sentimentalizes slavery, and that ultimately sustains and propagates a racialized image of the city that diminishes and distorts African American history and culture (p. 749).

Thomas illustrates that post-Katrina tours in the city are far from insignificant. She evokes questions about whose imaginaries the tours' competing narratives feed and their complicity in threatening the cultural memory of Black New Orleans.

In essence, the selected literature indicates a thread linking Black heritage tourism in cities to globalized economic priorities, colonial legacies, anti-Black racial narratives and mythologies (Thomas, 2009, p. 749), tourist desire, and local Black agency. This context helps frame my attentiveness to and honor of resistant curbside pedagogy, which I introduce in the following section.

3. Curbside pedagogy: Bringing glocal Black curricula to the streets

I needed my next tattoo, a quarter-sleeve with the quote, "Speak the truth, even if your voice shakes." Against my mama's wishes, I drove 20-plus hours, solo, for new ink. Along the way, I stopped in Philly, where I met Chrissy. I first learned about her "Morals + Murals Hood Tours" online. It is a part of the umbrella initiative, "Philly Experiences."

Over 40 percent of our population identifies as Black yet Black intersectionality is not properly represented in traditional tours in Center City particularly the last 50 years. We are hood advocates and experience curators who offer a variety of experiences that showcase the rich cultural heritage of Black Philadelphia, including historical landmarks, Black murals by local Black artists, businesses, current topics, local music, food and celebrities (*Philly Experiences*, 2023).

For over five years, Chrissy has facilitated tours of North and West Philly that revere Black and local counter-narratives. In her presence, I felt thankful to be entrusted with such stories that I otherwise could not access. Since, then, in 2021, I have returned to Philly and taken Black-led tours in other locations. While in New Orleans, I learned from Mama Vera. In my hometown, Detroit, I finally met Baba Jamon Jordan during the Black Scroll Network History and Tour. Most recently, I took a solo trip to Portugal, where I learned from Naky during the African Lisbon Tour.

My experiences frame my conceptualizing of curbside pedagogy (CP). Through witnessing, I have noticed these elements of CP:

- Hearing One's Own Voice: During the Morals + Murals Hood Tour, Chrissy shared about transitioning from photography to primarily vocalizing narratives about her life and hometown. Every time she facilitates a tour, she hears the sound of her voice offering memories, laments, hopes, truths, and visions.
- Summoning Responsibility & Resistance: I have never left a tour without a loving conviction of responsibility. How can I embody gratitude for the storyteller? How can I carry stories, with permission, to those who could not travel with me? Can I commit to the lifelong work of naming anti-Blackness, resisting erasure, and co-working toward something new?

- Grief and Healing: Across all tours, we, (the storyteller and participants) had space to grieve. We conversed and reflected on realities, like gentrification, sexual trauma, generational struggles, wage inequities, the transatlantic slave trade, anti-Blackness, Black narrative erasure, miseducation, and colonialism. We laughed, exchanged freedom dreams, and sensed resonances across locations in the Diaspora. Some of us, solo travelers, realized that we could experience community in places, where we otherwise felt anonymous.
- Volume: Stories and bodies took up space, self-consciously. For those of us not local, we had to trust our guide's fluency, intuition, and navigation of their communities and cities. We could not mindlessly participate. We needed to pause, look out for each other as we crossed streets and deboarded buses, and practice cognizance of the lives beyond our group.
- Ujamaa: This word is Swahili and a Kwanzaa principle, which symbolizes cooperative economics. It can be defined as "a commitment to the practice of shared social wealth and the work necessary to achieve it" (Mentor2Youth, 2021). Almost every tour provided an opportunity to patronize and learn from Black businesses, including Mama Vera's Community Book Center. In Detroit, Baba Jamon soulfully recited vignettes of Black people thriving in Black Bottom, a neighborhood mowed over for "urban renewal."
- Decolonial Cartographies: These Black storytellers render visible stolen and violated names, lives, bodies, stories, buildings, sounds, etc. They memorialize ancestors, such as when Naky discussed the street name, Rua do Poco dos Negros (the Well of the Black Pit). He talked about Portugal sanitizing the street's true history. In the 16th century, it was a burial and disposal site for enslaved Black bodies. "There has never been an excavation. It is one of the very rare references in the city to the presence of slavery in the city," said Naky.
- Glocal Black Curricula: As curbside pedagogy, Black storytellers engage in extensive self-reflexivity, thorough research, and ever-expanding community networks. They amplify city-based specificities in conversation with global and diasporic utilities and imaginings of Blackness.

4. Poetic 'Thank You' notes

My post-tour gratitude and debriefing practice often involves crafting poems and blog posts. After my *Moral and Murals Hood Tour* and *African Lisbon Tour* experiences, I could not rest until I wrote and shared about who and what I witnessed. Tagging Chrissy and Naky's professional accounts in my social media posts, I wanted to reflect back to them how I honored them as people, educators, and community-cultivators. I also hungered to let others know about the necessity, rigor, love, creativity, richness, and proud Blackness of their tour experiences. Below, I share two pieces I wrote, "Poem for Chrissy: The Philly Jawn" and "Thank You, Naky: The African Lisbon Tour." My poetry serves as inquiry into my glocal, transnational

Fig. 1. Chrissy, founder of Philly Experiences (photograph taken by author).

experiences and encounters. I repeatedly refer to Chambers (2023) celebration of poetry as a decolonial arts-based research practice for women of African descent. Her work asserts how "the commonalities amongst African, Afro-identified, and Black people, while recognizing their cultural heterogeneity and geographic diversity has become part of a broader decolonizing project ..." (p. 2). In alignment with this statement, I am deeply committed to passing on what I witness and learn and inviting my community to join me in activating such wisdom.

Poem for Chrissy: The Philly Jawn

Sometimes,
love means staying
where you are rooted
and learning
to be unashamed
of the soil
inside your garden
even though
it is still littered
with the history
of broken glass
and
broken people
broken by
white supremacy,
so broken
that though

they looked like you,
they still tried
to break your mirror,
Black girl.

You should have
always
seen yourself as
beautiful.
You should have
always
been protected.
You should have
never
had to heal
before your time.

But you, Philly sis,
grew
into something
far more
than a wound.
You are a whole
organic
fruit tree,
tall
and Black,
leaves leaving
legacies
of broken cycles,
seeds planting
exhales
of permission
in your people's mouths, like:
"it's okay
to be Black
and cry",
"it's okay
to be Black
and say,
'that hurt me.'"
"it's okay
to be Black

and air
dirty clothes
in therapy
and moments
with anyone
needing
to listen,
to know
they're not alone."
"it's okay
to stay hood
and demand
respect
with the defense
of being human."
"it's okay
to be Black
and tend
to your garden,
to make up
your Black mind
that love
is your water
to pour
just as it
is your water
to drink."
"it's okay
to be Black
and name
gentrification
a disease
contagious
between
cities."
"And no matter
how much
they try
to displace you,
it's okay
to be Black
and fight for home,
to be a tree

Fig. 2. Naky, founder of African Lisbon Tour (photograph taken by author).

and speak forests
of stories
from the ground,
living
and planting
deep beyond
the pull of
digging
and demolishing,
shading
and feeding
your people,
unapologetically."

Thank You, Naky: The African Lisbon Tour

Learn to read
the un-confessions
of national buildings
and monuments,
street signs
and textbooks
Say "yet again"
to the audacity
of whiteness,
the burying
of Black histories
by a proud nation
that stole
the most Africans

in the transatlantic
trafficking trade
Mourn the colonizers'
15th century prayers
for protection
on their saint named ships
and voyages of violence
Hold this Black history
in hand with today:
Portugal's systemic
uncare
for Black immigrants –
Brazilians and
Africans
from its former colonies
(What must
the colonizer
keep telling
itself and its youth
about itself
to cater
to its conscience?)
Stand on an area
that the griot
calls the Blackest square
in Lisbon,
a gathering space
and homegrown
counter-embassy
where African immigrants
can find their people
and a path
Hug the storyteller
who defies eraser
curriculum
and defines legacy
as teaching
so that we will transmit
Hug the sista
who is also
in the walking classroom
and shouts,
"What up doe!"

when you tell her
you're from her city,
too
Take notes
to soften your fears
of forgetting,
to archive
the miraculous
continuum
and complex fullness
of Blackness,
and to say thank you
to those who seek
to know truth

5. Conclusion

Hence, I conceptualize curbside pedagogy (CP) as a decolonial praxis that Black city-based tour guides – or, more accurately, educators and storytellers – have enacted. With this essay and its poetic offerings, I emphasize the rich truth-telling and knowledge generated through their pedagogical commitments. Specifically, I illuminate their vocal and embodied disruptions of historical and ongoing institutional erasures of colonial, anti-Black violences. Their curricula draws from thorough place-informed research, relationships, and personal journeys. A crucial part of their work, too, is inviting participants (often travelers) to join their work of dismantling and reconsidering narratives. All involved in these tours take part in occupying space, confronting discourses, reflecting on their locations and positionalities, being welcomed to feel, and envisioning how to honor what they learn. Ultimately, glocal (simultaneously local and global) conversations are enabled through these educators' efforts. On one level, tour guides, from Salvador to Philly, unearth and resist anti-Blackness occurring globally, yet in locally specific ways. Furthermore, tour participants join these city-based experiences from the context of where they call home. Importantly, these tours not only name Black struggle, but also realities and possibilities of Black joy.

During a subsequent visit to Philadelphia, in which I reunited with Chrissy, I heard poet Amir Sulaiman perform and say, "You will be somebody's ancestor. Act accordingly." I loudly celebrate folks like Chrissy and Naky who are embodying legacy, significantly through their work. I thank them for confirming that I am a part of a glocal Black community that is agentive and exponential in possibility. I end this paper with a short letter written to my ancestors. May it fill you up.

Dear Ancestors,

What made you laugh until your stomach ached?

During your life, if those around you were truly literate in you – mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually – what would they read? What languages would they need to speak in order to love you well?
What did you imagine?
What did you desire?
What did you grieve?
Who did you love and hoped loved you back?
What stories did you hold?
What were you most proud of?
What grace did you need to give yourself?
What did, what could family mean to you?

When I think about y'all, I confront an infinitude of undocumented names, intimacies, and inner galaxies. I, every so often, feel ritual tightness in my shoulders and routinely interrupt orderliness with a laughter that only belongs to me. I wonder what pieces of you I carry throughout my body, mannerisms, sounds, and depths. Along with imagining your lifetimes, I try to make sense of mine as an extension to generations after me. Faith prompts me to believe that, perhaps, I was created for such a time as this. Maybe, too, I have been entrusted to specific strangers, teachers, loved ones, and so on with whom I will physically share space on this Earth. Joy and responsibility magnetize me toward being in community with Black people and youth across cultural, linguistic, and geographic locations. I want to co-author stories, conversations, legacies, and dreams with Black people, girls, and youth.

It gets difficult, living in the longing-unknowing about many of you who I could not be without. But, I narrate that I am not alone. I am a member of a glocal Black community, undaunted by borders. We are prioritizing a journey toward knowledge of self and each other. We are honoring our ancestors, even if only accessing fragments and speculative fictions. We are conversing across diasporas, visiting each other when we can, committing through the complexities, and declaring that our stories and existences are in permanent ink.

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