

# A Note on the Pedagogy of Equity

by Diana Baird N'Diaye

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A little more than 30 years ago, I was an organizer (with my late Schomburg colleague Dierdre Bibby) of the Arts of Black Folk Conference for Community Organizations, where Madaha Kinsey-Lamb of Mind-Builders Creative Arts met Beverly Robinson and co-created the Folklore Internship that bears Dr. Bev's name. The conference was co-sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, which had recently become a part of the New York Public Library. The event was born out of the desire to introduce more African American community organizations to resources for doing their own folklore research and for building capacity to create research-based public programs that shared important narratives and expressive culture within and beyond local communities. So, even in the era before everyone had a cellphone with a camera and microphone, Mind-Builders' high school aged interns with their instructors were learning to recognize and record the wisdom, heritage arts, and cultural practices of their peers, their elders, and others in their immediate communities.

While interviewing master performers like Scoby Stroman about how he learned to drum and to dance, Mind-Builders interns learned about the realities of musicians in transition from Africa to America, from South to North. In presenting milliners like CeJunel Lewis in libraries for their peers, they shared her perspectives about the history of the church hats she makes for churchgoers.

**This is a pedagogy of equity because the creation of knowledge—through the documentation and interpretation of experience, events, and community practice—is not a neutral act.** It is subjective and can be subversive in the best sense of the word. The stories recorded may be joyful, painful, or a bit of both, but they are essential. As we have seen in recent times, in the service of social justice and building bridges, the act of recording and communicating personal and community narratives using cellphones and social media can be powerful and transformative. It can open up long suppressed conversations between people in the Bronx and in the United States. It can counter divisions and reveal inequities.

*The Dr. Beverly J. Robinson Community Folk Culture Program quickly became a premiere department of Mind-Builders, nationally recognized through Beverly Robinson's mentorship and dedication. After her passing, our growth, visibility, and learning expanded through a dynamic partnership strengthened over the years through Diana Baird N'Diaye of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. She invited us to join the brilliant, multifaceted Smithsonian [Will to Adorn Project](#) as a community research partner. Diana had worked with NYSCA on the Arts of Black Folk Conference where I met Beverly in 1988. Will to Adorn promotes ongoing reciprocal learning, continuing to excite, challenge, and fuel our curriculum development. As we observe and communicate about the raging news and developments, the many ways this work promotes the fervent commitment to equity is reiterated.*

