

CONSCIOUS KAZI, STILL THE BLACKEST OF ALL
TEACHING WORK AT AHIDIANA WORK/STUDY CENTER

Kazi is a KiSwahili word for work. Kazi at Ahidiana Work/Study Center is that part of the day which balances Darasa. Darasa is a controlled and structured class session in which the teacher makes the decisions and determines which activities will be done. Kazi is a structured series of tasks in which the students make decisions.

During Kazi the students are leaders while the teachers are the observers and/or aids. Kazi is structured in that the teachers have set limits by:

1. establishing protocol, prescribed procedures, guidelines necessary to help students work in a disciplined (self-controlled) and orderly manner;
2. creating work activities that are self-corrective, self-instruction and self-reinforcing; and
3. preparing a planned environment.

Kazi is not “play” time for our students nor is it “rest” time for teachers.

Kazi is for self-motivated and self-directed learning. Kazi is for intense and critical evaluation. It is that part of the day in which our children practice Kujichagulia (Self-determination) and Kuumba (Creativity). Students struggle to actualize, on their own and with their peers, those values, knowledge and skills they have learned. There is encouragement from teachers to help our students follow the direction expected of them. There is experimentation on the part of our students to test the value of that direction. In Kazi we see the depth of our teaching. The students lead in Kazi and the teacher usually observes and helps when asked to help. Teachers can see where we need to reinforce concepts and which concepts have actually been learned.

What is Kazi? Kazi is a series of tasks created by the teacher to stress independence, discipline and responsibility in students. Kazi can take place in any room. There are boxes of various sizes, shapes and colors containing activities which reinforce concepts already taught or that may challenge students to learn on their own. Some students decide to work at tables while others work on the floor using the classroom’s walls to help them lineup activity cards and/or group pictures or objects. Some children are putting their work away. Some are busy working alone or with a partner or partners. Others are busy deciding on what to work on next. One or two students have their fists up to show that they need help or have completed their work and are ready to discuss it with the teachers. There is general quietness with gentle reminders from the teachers or quiet discussions between a student(s) and a teacher or among students about an activity.

Kazi does not mean just letting children “loose” on their own. Our children come into this world working, that is, spending energy to get a job done, constantly learning, hungry for knowledge. We adults too often and unconsciously kill this energy or allow it to develop randomly, so that, by the time our children enter preschool at two or three years old, their energy and hunger to know must be reawakened or redirected. We rekindle or redirect children’s natural need and desire to work and study by beginning each year with an orientation period in which basics are clarified and stressed.

The purpose of the orientation is to teach our students who we are, what we must do and how we must do it. Once the answers to these are learned, security and confidence begins to grow in our children. They begin to gain identity, purpose and direction. They become more serious about school and learning. Through repeated drill our students begin to see themselves in a total plan with a specific and valuable role.

We teach our students respect for self, others and property. We believe that respect is one of the first signs of conscious life. It is imperative that our children are taught to pay attention to the presence of themselves and others. They must learn to appreciate what they themselves and others have to offer and to acknowledge the worth of themselves and others. We respect property by being clear on the use and/or function of property and reminding each other about its use.

One of the ways we develop respect is through requiring protocol. Our protocol in Kazi is very simple, direct and basic.

1. Work quietly and cooperatively.
2. Use materials in the correct manner.
3. Raise your hand in a fist when you need help.
4. Raise your hand in a fist when you complete a job.
5. Be orderly. Return all tools and activities to their proper place.

This protocol helps structure Kazi and keep it from being a random, liberal, “do anything, it’s alright” part of the day.

Our materials used in Kazi are teacher-made or purchased commercially. These materials are (1) inspirational, (2) functional and (3) in keeping with the values and academics advocated by our school. Inspirational materials are colorful, orderly and clean. When we say materials are functional we mean that they have a specific purpose in our children’s development. The materials are also clear in concept and durable, made to hold up under steady use and not constructed in such a way that it breaks or tears after repeated use. Finally, the materials are operable. We are not interested in plastic doo-dads that do essentially nothing nor are we interested in complicated fan-dangles that are frustratingly difficult for our children to operate or work with.

We are very careful about materials we purchase for use in our school. Because conscious African-Americans do not create some of the materials that we buy, so often ideas, aspirations and concepts embodied in and emphasized by these materials are not what we need and sometimes run directly counter to what we teach. We must be especially careful with so-called “academic” materials. Many of the newer educational materials heavily push integration or humanism while the older ones push white supremacy. The newer ones, however, are potentially more destructive because if you look closely you will find Europeans/white people taking the lead with Black and Third World people looking on or neighborhoods and schools that working people do not live in with well-dressed “negroes” and their white friends talking about their pets doing “funny” things. Thus, such materials are actually more pervasive and perpetuate and promote white supremacy, classism and sometimes male dominance. Books are particularly very difficult to choose because often there may be excellent and attractive illustrations accompanied by backward and negative texts.

Educational materials should also teach the socialization process, that is, cooperation, sharing and respect. When we buy or make materials we usually purchase or produce one or two of a given tool or game. We struggle to set up situations which will teach our students to wait their turn and/or share and work tougher. Also this is less expensive and teaches us to make the most of our limited resources.

We believe the importance of Kazi cannot be overemphasized. Kazi is a complement to Darasa. Hence, our teaching approach is called Darasa/Kazi.

Kazi is important.

1. It is a time for our students to struggle to practice the values, to creatively apply what they know and to become aware of their capabilities.
2. It is an observation and testing time for the teachers to witness the development of each student socially and academically and thus make improvements in lessons, materials as well as clarifying values and concepts.
3. It is an opportunity to promote positive social development. Through Kazi our children are not just simply told that they must work together, but rather through daily experiences they actually participate in and eventually internalize experiences that actively promote the working-together process.

During Kazi our students have the opportunity to satisfy their interest and aspirations. They can tell themselves and challenge themselves while working in a nonthreatening environment which promotes sustained and concentrated activity. They can practice what has been routinely learned in Darasa. Teachers try to have materials in Kazi that directly relate to and reinforce the values and academic concepts currently taught in Darasa.

During Kazi our teachers have a time to reinforce concepts and values. This is also a noncompetitive testing part of the day during which our students are given an excellent opportunity to demonstrate their strengths and then strengthen their weaknesses.

Kazi, then, helps teach our children how to function in a controlled environment, how to make decisions, how to creatively arrive at solutions to problems. Remember, in Kazi our students are on their own and only require a teacher's input to check work that is completed or to give specific aid if and only if that aid is asked for. By following the protocol during Kazi and being self-motivated, our children, at an average age, begin to develop the ability to observe and analyze materials and situations they learn to decide, on their own, how work should be done. Finally, they actually carry their decisions through to completion.

We are teaching our children to be soldiers and warriors, willfully active in our people's liberation struggle. Kazi provides them with an early opportunity to work on what they learn, so that later in life, they can actively contribute to the betterment of Black life in a meaningful, positive, forceful and ultimately, decisive manner.

We will not "luck up" on strong committed leaders. In order for our children to have the capability, that is, the will and the ability, to continue our struggle for unification, liberation and independence, we must consciously and consistently work to set for them an excellent example of active struggle. We must pass on to our children the knowledge and skills that will be necessary, not only to defy and defeat the enemy, but also and most importantly, to defend and develop ourselves. This commitment, this capability, this knowledge and these skills cannot be taught to our children in the abstract by words in the air, but rather must be taught in the concrete through day to day practice. Conscious Kazi, that is, the work of self-aware and self-controlled black people, is still the Blackest of all.

TEACH OUR CHILDREN TO TAKE THE LEAD!!!