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# THE BLACK KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

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Know thyself,  
love thyself

Nº02- 2020



**Education:  
the alternative  
curriculum**

# WELCOME!

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## HAPPY NEW ACADEMIC YEAR!

### ...OR IS IT? ...

Whilst September marks the beginning of a new academic year – new hopes and ambitions – the wild ride to where we find ourselves has afforded us the opportunity to reflect on the Black-British experience in all spheres of society, education included.

It's no secret that the UK education system has been **disproportionately 'failing' black students for generations**. The greater travesty is that we have made little gains towards redressing the balance. The question is, why? And who or what are we waiting for to instigate the change needed?

Unfortunately for too long the vast majority of us have been passively complicit, in what the statistics suggest has been **a sustained campaign of prejudice**, waged against black children in mainstream education – their hopes and ambitions are the casualties, found “unresponsive” during the recovery operation.

Along with the many other voices within our community, we believe that a rounded education (cultural and academic) is the wellspring through which the individual explores, navigates and ultimately arrives at a given destination. Too often within our community, the destination is predefined before we have even set course.

Covid-19 lockdown measures and the hypersensitivity to institutional racism across society's operating spaces, has galvanised a shift – **a surge in the response** to the shortcomings of the State education sector.

We are no longer waiting; we are redressing the *imbalance*. A simple search online will tell you; black parents and carers are no longer prepared to passively accept a system that “rejects” their children. In this edition of TBKS, we speak with two of the UK's eminent educators on some of the practical steps parents and carers should consider to effectively scale the tall demands placed by an alternative, black curriculum:

- Rijole Bitata, Founder of STEAM Power, reveals how we future-proof our children and community's competitive edge through STEAM education.
- David Simon, Director at Simon Education talks best-practice on home schooling; online education resources and capacity building for a sustainable approach to education delivery.

True to our purpose, throughout this edition, we signpost you to the resources to inform and enable you to confidently make the right choices that put your family and our community first.

Abundant life & love to all,

The Editor.

# INTERVIEW

By Esther Ademosu

**‘DO NOT WAIT FOR A SCHOOL REPORT TO TELL YOU WHAT YOUR CHILD IS CAPABLE OF’.  
DISCOVER THE POWER OF STEAM EDUCATION.**



Any community, and by extension nation, that seeks to flourish socially, industrially and economically cannot afford to turn a blind eye to the relevance of a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts & Mathematics) education philosophy.

TBKS met with Educator and Founder of STEAM Power Limited, Rijole Bitata, to understand the learning methodology that a number of research studies, nations and education practitioners are lauding as part of an essential future-proofing strategy, fortify good economic posture and producing industrial competitive advantage through a workforce of innovators.

Rijole identifies Africa as a potential beneficiary of embedded STEAM practice. We asked if STEAM practice could play a role in counteracting the failings of the UK education system within the black community - and its place, in strengthening our community's ambition of sustainable prosperity and development.

**A warm welcome, Rijole!**

**Tell us about your journey from mainstream traditional academia to Founder of STEAM Power Ltd?**

My journey into STEAM began while I was working in the mainstream, over ten years ago. As a practitioner, you are always looking for ways to inspire children. Getting children to love science does not have to begin with worksheets, learning does not begin like that. **Many children around the world**, show great ability in STEAM and that's even before they are taught anything about it.

**What does STEAM education look like in the UK at present?**

STEAM education in the UK are just days in the school calendar in which schools can centre their teaching plans around this area. Children love this opportunity because they are taken out of the routine - listen, complete this worksheet and handed it at the end of the session. When it comes to STEAM, children are praised and applauded on their creativity, resilience and teamwork efforts.

**STEAM education is targeted towards more affluent families.** When I started researching about STEM activities, I always found myself looking at central London but never in local neighbourhoods. The price tag for a robotic summer camp a few years ago was within in the region of £400 which is something that many families in the community cannot afford. According to **The Faraday Institute**; 'STEM skills are crucial for the UK's productivity. A shortage of STEM skills in the workforce is a key economic problem'.

**How should we understand the value to, impact upon and relevance of STEAM academic practice within the black community?**

STEAM education is a financial engine that allows countries to compete in the global market. As statistics show, black students who pursue a career in this field can contribute immensely to the economic growth of that country.

On the continent, STEM education is the way forward. Remember, STEM is about being creative, solving problems, being resilient; the continent has a plethora of problems.

Future students, equipped with the right mindset and skills could solve them without relying or waiting for foreign intervention. They could make a great difference to their communities - some young people are already are! STEAM education is our key to freedom!

**In its inaugural roundtable, Equity in STEM Education, the British Science Association cited notable gender, class and racial disparities in the uptake of STE[A]M subjects at A-level and higher education. What, in your opinion and experience, has been the barrier to adoption of and participation in STEAM subjects within the black community?**

Firstly; the narrative around STEM has always been the same; it is for white, middle class men. Many young people in the community do not see it as a field that they belong to. Limiting beliefs play a key role, what we have been taught in school and at home can influence our career choices.

Secondly; throughout the years, I have seen many different attitudes across the many black communities. For instance, in the African community, education is revered and children can be influenced by their parents to take on a career in the field. In other communities, parents have less influence.

**How can we practically redress the balance? What role should parents, teachers and other social/academic actors play to facilitate a more inclusive STEAM landscape?**

At STEAM Power we are promoting forensic science; we have put together events that get children talking about the possibilities of becoming a private investigator or a forensic scientist. At these events, children explore with strange substances such as slime, learn how to dust fingerprints, cast footprints and other tasks that are involved in solving crime.

Sometimes as adults, we need to ask, 'Why can't my child learn about this now?'

Why does your child need to wait? Learning doesn't take place in chapters, it is more like a wave. Your child does not need to be "clever" to learn something that is not taught in schools. Do not wait for a school report to tell you what your child is capable of.

If you are a parent who thinks that your child is not clever, you are looking at a cup that is half empty; support your child's journey from a starting point of abundance - and work with your child from where they are, not where they should be. Empower your child by allowing them to take part in activities that stretch the content of his character more than his academic abilities. Find out what is going on in your local area or online! Join networking groups to meet other parents like you. Be active!

**For parents/carers who may be wondering, what are some of the typical career pathways a STEAM education promotes?**

STEAM education can lead to many career paths; biology, chemistry, medicine, mathematician, nursing, surgeon; the list is vast!

For more on STEAM Power Ltd or to continue the conversation, with Rijole directly, please get in touch on the following information:  
info@steampowerltd.com  
@steampowerltd (Instagram & twitter)  
Rijole Bitata (LinkedIn)

Rijole joins us as a guest panellist on our Zoom Live, alongside, Bro Andrew Mohammad ("The Investigator") and Kehinde Ogunlabi (Manhood Academy). Join us next Wednesday, September 30th from 8pm as we move the conversation forward to points of action.

# HOME-SCHOOLING

## ‘IS IT FOR US?’, GETTING IT RIGHT AND AVOIDING ‘BURNOUT’

By Esther Ademosu

TBKS met with David Simon, Director at Simon Education, one of the UK’s leading black education platforms. His depth of experience informs the insightful commentary below, revealing answers to the pertinent questions on home-schooling that an increasing number in the community are now asking:

“Simon Education’s journey started in 1987, in response to the 1985 [Swann Report](#) that looked at the underachievement of African Caribbean children. I was a newly qualified teacher back in 1987 and wanted to support children in the local area of Lewisham, south-east London.

At that stage we were known as the Ebony Saturday School. Some 25 years later, we ended up opening ten schools and homework clubs, tutoring 6,000 children.

...So Simon Education is 33 years old in effect – a natural evolution from Ebony. We graduated from providing Saturday schools in local communities, to a number of services for the African-Caribbean community, in seven main areas:

1. the annual [Black Book Festival](#)
2. [Black History online courses](#)
3. teacher training and provision of basic educational resources for school in Africa and the Caribbean, formally branded [SEADS](#)
4. an [online school](#)
5. parenting courses, delivered three times a year based on one of our books, *How to Unlock your Child’s Genius*
6. We’ve just launched a time bank. The time bank is an exchange of skills and very much like the ‘susu’ cooperative microfinance models developed by the African community, termed ‘pardner’ within the Caribbean community.
7. The last of the seven strings to the ecology is publishing. [We currently have 46 educational books](#) that we provide to the African and Caribbean community.

### CONTEXT AND MOTIVES

“Home-schooling the UK has been a white middle-class endeavour. There was not such a big demand in the black community when we started in 1989. It’s slowly grown. About six years ago parents were contacting us asking if we could home-school.

We began to send tutors to the home. But the feedback I received from tutors was that the parents were ill-equipped; (the child would be in bed... and so on). It was a mixed picture; some parents were doing it very well, others were okay and others, poorly.

The reasons parents enrol for home-schooling are vast and varied: the child is not learning, racism, bullying, a teacher picking on the child, religious or cultural. There are some parents whose

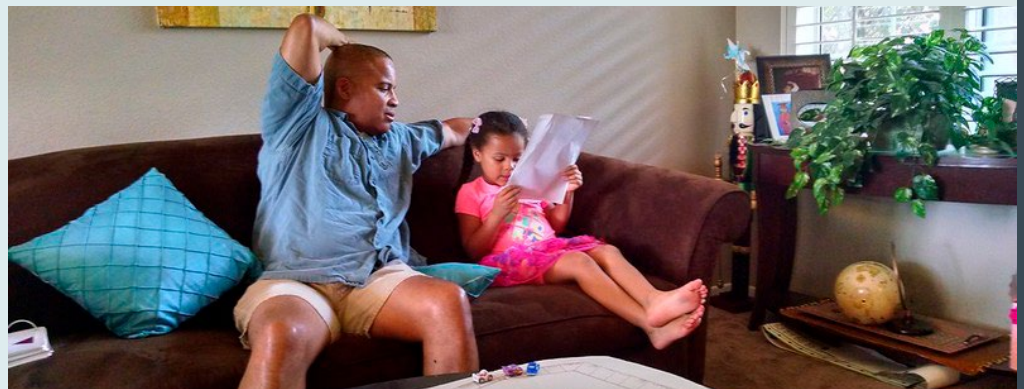
children may have been excluded and do not want their child sent to a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU).

There are various scenarios; ultimately, the home should be organised for learning. The community of educators should be gathered to support the child and the parent should strategically try to buy in some services like online learning.

We are getting a lot of parents contacting us saying that they want to home-school their child – and we try to talk them out of it. A lot of the time, it’s a reaction to a bad situation. But if there’s absolutely no alternative then we will agree to support.

Two parents approached us recently who said they wanted to use our services. We delayed them and both have informed us that they are now going back to school. So it was an emotional reaction.

Around 80 percent of the parents we come into contact with reconsider and don’t actually go through with home-schooling. That statistic could be changing rapidly due to the Covid-19 situation. We suspect that a lot more people who are capable of home-schooling are going to be home-schooling.



One such example; we do have a collective of between seven and nine parents, who have formed a home-schooling group. They are not going back to school; they are really happy. But what tends to happen is that the parent leading the group tends to burn out because they’re doing so much. They totally underestimated the big physical and mental effort it takes to coordinate other families. It can be extremely difficult – and costly, when you come together to cover subjects like drama, art or sports.

### ‘GOOD-PRACTICE’ AND OUTCOMES:

“In response to demand and to mitigate ‘burnout’ scenarios, we set up online training for parents wishing to home-school. The notes from the

presentation eventually became a book.

What we say in the book is that parents should really prepare. There should be at least a three months’ preparation period, where they look at good-practice, look at research, identify a curriculum - or curricula - they want to follow; identify a support network so that they are not doing it by themselves.

We also suggest they undertake formal training, to effectively facilitate the child’s learning and to understand what resources are required in the home.

At Simon Education, we would ask our clients to also do some required reading around various education philosophies, so that they are starting from a point of knowledge, rather than learning as they go. It can damage the child quite significantly if they don’t know what they’re doing.

Personally, I feel the best time to introduce home-schooling is at primary school age. It gets harder the closer you get to secondary level and GCSEs because you’ve got to ensure that your child is going to do a minimum of five GCSEs –

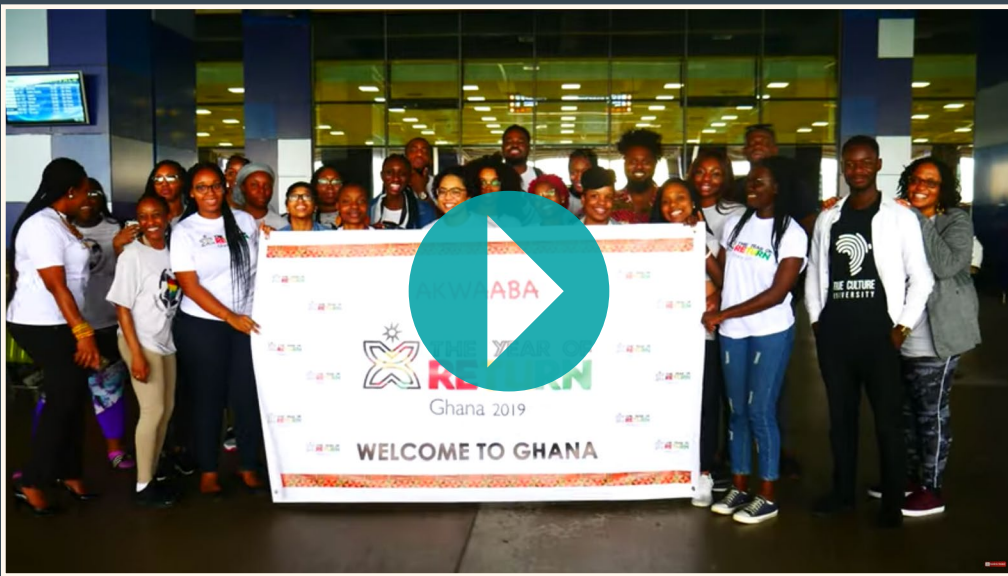
the sciences, where they need the laboratory and Information Technology (IT), where hardware and software may be required.

This is one of the more common reasons why some people do go for flexi-learning, where the child will learn in a school part time - three days at home, two days at school.

Research does show that a child home-schooled well can be two and a half years ahead of their peers.

There are many good education packages out there now. As long as you know what you’re doing, - and you network so that your child gets the socialisation - you can do very well.”

# SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONTINENT



With this edition throwing light on the value of holistic education, here we point to the mobilising power of knowledge, which in 2019 saw over 300,000 descendants of African descendant from around the world, “pilgrimage” to, Ghana for the **Year of Return**.

This powerful footage, courtesy of the Ghana Tourism Authority, reminds us of the potential, possibility, and power available to us when we unlearn the myths and embrace the facts of who we are.

Mental liberation, through education, must be our starting point, if we are to realise the new frontiers promised to the continent.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ld4K32EgVBg>

## RESOURCES DIRECTORY

### Five links to...

By Esther Ademosu

#### Enrol

**Simon Education** is a root-to-branch online education platform. Expect to find everything from resource to deliver best-in-class tuition, to innovative approaches on capacity building educators within the local and global black community.

**Black History Studies** have been ‘educating the community to educate themselves’ for over a decade. Their **Introduction to Black Studies course** is a popular choice for the newly “woke”.

**The Investigator** offers a range of course and workshops, designed to promote, repair, and restore the forgotten virtues of our community.

**Manhood Academy:** the phrase ‘school to prison pipeline’ has unfortunately become an all too familiar feature of the discourse on black male youths. Manhood Academy have not only made it their mission to stem the flow; the organisation is tooling up the entire black family, steering those in need in the right direction.

#### Tour

**Black History Walks**

## The alternative curriculum: continue the conversation

Join TBKS’ Zoom Live

Weds, 30/Sept/2020

Click here to join Wednesday’s meeting 8:00pm – 9:15pm (BST)

