

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY THROUGH AFRICAN-CENTERED
METHODS IN A MIDWESTERN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological case study was to develop a narrative of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) through African-centered methods and to describe the strategies and/or best practices utilized by effective teachers who taught at one Midwestern elementary school. For the purposes of this inquiry, CRP through African-centered methods is defined as centering the Black child in the curriculum as a subject rather than an object, which allows for an inclusionary process, giving equal representation of all cultural groups rather than one over the other (Khepera, 2007). Hegemonic practices, social dominance, and outdated teaching models/methods have limited the academic and social success of many students of color in the United States (Howard, 1999), specifically Black students, as demonstrated by low test scores and higher levels of poverty, illiteracy, crime, teen pregnancy, and dropout rates. Hegemony for this inquiry is described as the dominant group's influence on a culturally diverse society with their beliefs, explanations, perceptions, and values (Banks, 2010).

Case studies of five teachers were utilized to investigate the research questions. The driving research question for this inquiry was: How did teachers in one urban elementary school use culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods to

support high levels of academic achievement and social success for their students?

School documents, survey questionnaires, teacher interviews, and poetry were utilized for data collection and analysis. The principal methods of data analysis were the six phases in the heuristic process of phenomenological analysis: (a) initial engagement, (b) immersion, (c) incubation, (d) illumination, (e) explication, and (f) creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). Crystallization, a postmodern approach to triangulation, was utilized throughout the immersion phase (Ellingson, 2009).

Four major themes emerged in these data: expectations, validation, school culture and curriculum, and pedagogy. Expectations were defined as a strong belief held by staff, students, and the school community that students would succeed academically and socially using a culturally rich curriculum. Validation was interpreted as the awareness that the work the teachers, students, administration, and school was doing was of value to all people. School culture concentrated on the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, and attitudes that influence every aspect of the school. Curriculum and pedagogy was based on the “what” is being taught in the classroom and “how” it being taught.

APPROVAL PAGE

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation entitled “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy through African-centered Methods in a Midwestern Urban Elementary School,” presented by Jimmie Bullard, a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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GLOSSARY

1. Hegemony, for this inquiry, is described as the dominant group's influence on a culturally diverse society with their beliefs, explanations, perceptions, and values (Banks, 2010).
2. African-centered Education means centering the Black child in the curriculum as a subject rather than an object, which allows for an inclusionary process, giving equal representation of all cultural groups rather than one over the other (Khepera, 2007).
3. Culturally relevant pedagogy. Gay (2000) states, "culturally responsive teaching is about teaching, and the teaching of concern is that which centers classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of reference" (p. xix).
4. Harambee (ha ra m' be) is a Kiswahili word used in East African countries that means pulling together (Khepera, 2007).
5. Ma'at (muh-aht mey-uh t) is the idea that there is always a correspondence or correlation between the laws and phenomena of the various levels of being and life (Hilliard, 1995).
6. Kuumba (koo-OOM-bah). To do always as much as we can in the way that we can in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than when we inherited it (Pauley, 1996).
7. Kujichagulia (koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-ah). To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves (Pauley, 1996).
8. Nia (nee-AH). To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness (Pauley, 1996).

9. Imani (ee-MAH-nee). To believe, with all our heart, in our Creator, our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders, and the righteousness and victory of our struggle (Pauley, 1996).
10. Ujamaa (oo-JAH-mah). To build our own businesses, control the economics of our own community and share in all its work and wealth (Pauley, 1996).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many urban school districts in the United States continue to exhibit European cultural dominance through hegemonic practices that influence outdated curricula and ineffective teaching models for educating students of color, more specifically Black students. Hegemony for this inquiry is described as the dominant cultures influence on a culturally diverse society through their beliefs, explanations, perceptions, and values (Banks, 2010). People of color are unconsciously coerced into a hegemonic system – this is what public education is, and the students and families just accept the situation. Peter McLaren (1997) stresses that hegemony in regards to schools and curricula, is unconsciously done through dominant ways of thinking about educational practices. People of color are engulfed in it / engaged in it / and subconsciously submit to it without question.

To improve the educational landscape for students of color, it is vital to reform and align educational institutions to make them more culturally vibrant and relevant. For the purposes of this inquiry, culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) through African-centered methods is defined as centering the Black child in the curriculum as a subject rather than an object, which allows for an inclusionary process, giving equal representation to all cultural groups rather than one over the other (Khepera, 2007). It is an encouraging and legitimate educational reform model that seeks to validate all cultures, allowing for curriculum equity, educational efficacy, and relevant learning, as opposed to power, privilege and domination. A school environment that represents the culture of all students promotes positive self-esteem, imaging, and identity (Gay, 2000).

This research inquiry explored the perceptions of five former elementary teachers who worked at Harambee Elementary (a pseudonym), a K-5 elementary school located in the urban core of a Midwestern school district, which served a predominantly Black student population. According to the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the student population of the Midwestern school of my research inquiry was between 98.9% and 100% Black from 2000 to 2006 (State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MDESE], 2006). The school's free and reduced lunch population was between 65.4 % and 88.4%; the attendance rate ranged between 96.9 and 98.9%; and annual levels of academic achievement in both reading and math ranged from 36% to 72% proficient and/or advanced (MDESE, 2006). These data trends affirm that low-income students can achieve at high levels academically.

While Harambee Elementary managed to meet the state's academic performance standards annually, the Midwestern school district it was located in was not as fortunate. The Midwestern district lost its accreditation in the early 2000's, due to a failure to meet any of the 11 academic performance standards established by the state of State (MDESE, 2000). The majority of the district's Black students were not achieving the same academic success as the students who attended Harambee Elementary. In fact, there was a performance gap in high academic achievement among the Black students who attended Harambee Elementary as compared to their academic and ethnic cohorts being instructed at other traditional Midwestern district schools.

The achievement gap traditionally refers to the gaps in standardized norm referenced achievement between students of color versus their White counterparts (National Association of Education Professionals [NAEP], 2012). The gaps in

achievement traditionally exist across grade spans and ethnicities. However, there were also noticeable gaps of higher academic achievement between Black students who were instructed using CRP embedded through African-centered methods, compared against students instructed using Eurocentric methods. This raises the research question: Is it the student or the pedagogy?

The Problem

The problem is that many Black students in one Midwestern district and across the nation are not achieving, academically, at the same level as their European American counterparts. The discontinuity has been attributed to many factors, such as outdated curriculum and teaching methods/models employed by the district. This Midwestern school district was dominated by a district-wide culture of hegemonic teaching and learning paradigms and practices (e.g., curriculum, outdated teaching methods, instructional approaches, and professional development). Regarding hegemonic curriculum, Banks (1993) proclaims: “It ignores fully the experiences, voices, contributions, and perspectives of non-dominant individuals and groups in all subject areas” (p. 195). Furthermore, hegemony in education prepares students of color to accept European perspectives and values as the values for all races (Banks).

The district of my inquiry is not an isolated Midwestern district; most schools in the United States incorporate a dominant hegemonic approach to educating students. According to Anderson and Kharem (2009), hegemonic curriculums have dominated American education in the U.S. since its inception. A curriculum that solely focuses on the beliefs and ideals of the dominant culture reinforces the status quo (Murrell, 2002). Freire (1997) emphasizes this approach to teaching strengthens the existing state of

affairs and limits socio-cultural opportunities for advancement for oppressed ethnic populations.

Similarly, Howard (1999) defines this style of teaching as the banking model. He emphasizes that the teacher educates the student with a curriculum that is “influenced by colonial beliefs and power relations” (p. 46). The district of my inquiry used many of the methods illustrated in the banking model. According to MDESE (2000), the academic methods and instructional models used by the Midwestern district of my inquiry did not improve students’ achievement, as demonstrated by high dropout rates and subpar measures of academic achievement based upon standardized academic performance indicators. This underscores the potential value of reconfiguring the curriculum in a more culturally relevant manner.

Having attended elementary, middle, and high school in the Midwestern district of my inquiry, I can testify to the hegemonic curriculum and the subpar education provided to students of color caused by exclusionary practices founded on racial differences. I remember rarely seeing people that looked like me in the textbooks or curriculum. Parents of children who attended Harambee Elementary school held similar beliefs. According to a 2005 survey given to parents of children who attended Harambee Elementary School, 98% implied the curriculum was not diverse enough; 99% wanted their children to learn more about their culture; and 97% believed their children would be more successful in a school that implemented an African-centered curriculum.

To address concerns related to district performance and de facto segregation, the Midwestern district of my inquiry was under court supervision from 1977 to 2000, after a lawsuit was filed by school district parents. The lawsuit was filed as an attempt to counter

hegemonic practices in a school system that had a 26% academic gap between black and White students as measured by statewide assessments. Regrettably, the outcome of the case did not improve student achievement for students of color; the district was never able to obtain full accreditation and lost its provisional accreditation again. Academic gaps between black and White students are not isolated to the Midwestern district of my inquiry. Such gaps continue to occur in many school districts throughout this nation.

According to a NAEP (2012) state comparison report, there was a 25% scale score difference in fourth grade achievement between black and White students. The largest gap of student achievement occurred in the District of Columbia where the achievement gap was 62% between White and black students. Madhubuti and Madhubuti (1994) theorize the problem concerning traditional education is that “African [American] students are taught to perceive the world through the eyes of another culture, and unconsciously learn to see themselves as an insignificant part of their world” (p. 8). This causes students of color to feel inferior in school, thus limiting their ability to excel academically. When a student’s engagement with the curriculum is limited or the student feels that the curriculum does not pertain to them, they are less likely to understand what is being taught. Many researchers refer to “the achievement gap” as a gap in various test scores between Whites and non-Whites (Kirkland, 2010).

Many Black scholars dispute the performance gap between races, asserting that the construct is racially biased. Kirkland (2010) says:

It [the achievement gap] seems to blame oppressed groups for their oppression as well as their identities, for suffering and for not being white. It compares relatively unlike groups as if they were the same. While I am in no position to bash the residents of today for the crimes of yesterday, I must note that the uneven access to knowledge and power, to schooling and instruments of assessment in this nation is cause alone to question the achievement gap ideology. (p. 2)

Likewise, Ayers (2010) disagrees that the achievement gap is an accurate measure of student performance. He affirms that the achievement gap makes it appear that Whites are superior to non-Whites year after year—consciously or unconsciously. He suggests that this is due to the way test scores are used in the nation’s school system. United States schools use test scores to conclude if students have mastered skills and concepts at certain levels. The test does not take into consideration whether or not the student had access to the skills, which is the case in many urban school districts.

Kirkland’s (2010) and Ayers’s (2010) arguments are illustrated by data reported from the MDESE (2010b). For example, the Midwestern district communication arts state assessment results indicate that only 32.3% of Black students scored at proficient or advanced levels, compared to 60.7% of White students who scored proficient or advanced. The same was true for mathematics, where 30.7% of Black students scored proficient or advanced, while 60.6% of White students scored proficient or advanced (MDESE, 2010a). One of the prevailing reasons the district lost its accreditation in the early 2010s for the second time in a 12-year span was low student academic achievement on standardized tests.

The loss of accreditation may be due to the Eurocentric-influenced curriculum and outdated teaching models utilized by the district. The district’s curriculum and practices are similar to those of many school districts throughout the country. The content generally contains the history of the dominant culture and presents lessons in a style that has been successful educating the dominant culture’s children, with limited mention of other cultures. The poor test scores may suggest that the district’s conventional teaching

methods are not benefiting students of color, specifically Black, to meet achievement goals, and these methods continue to perpetuate the racial gap.

The Assessment

Many African-centered scholars and Black educators around the country believe that standardized achievement tests are racially biased. Hilliard (1991) theorizes that the designers of tests do so from the perspective of the dominant race, and the tests may have no relevance for many of the students who are tested, specifically students of color. He states, “Students that have not mastered the language of the test developer are at a disadvantage before the test is administered” (p. 47). Many opponents of intelligence testing agree with Hilliard, arguing that the test developers’ environment and culture play a role in the type of questions they create (Anderson & Kharem, 2009; Murrell, 2002; Shujaa, 1994; Whiting & Ford, 2009).

Intelligence testing can be a disadvantage to Black students and other students of color. Whiting and Ford (2009) emphasize “persons from backgrounds other than which the tests was developed will always be penalized, will likely score lower on tests and, thus, have their opportunities limited and have misinterpretations about their worth and potential” (p. 1). This resonated with me and led me to question how I felt after scoring low on standardized test throughout my academic career. Thus, the test itself may be a valid concern when analyzing student data. I also lived in poverty and wondered whether that contributed to my educational outcomes.

Poverty

Poverty may also explain why students in the Midwestern district were not able to achieve at the same level as their White counterparts. Nationwide, Black children

represent the highest percentage of children living in poverty in the U.S. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2011), there are significant gaps between the percentage of Blacks (37.4%), Hispanics (34.1%), and Whites (12.5%) living in poverty (see Figure 1)

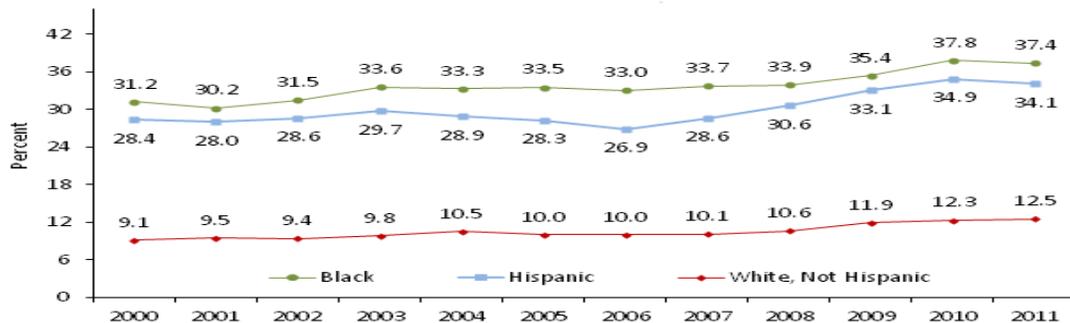


Figure 1. Poverty Percentages of Black, Hispanics and Whites in Midwest

Note: The figure compares the poverty percentages of Black, Hispanics, and Whites. The years of the study were between 2000 and 2011.

Payne (1996) theorizes that there is a parallel between academics and poverty. She believes that poverty is a contributing factor in the academic achievement gap between Black and White students. She states that there are two types of poverty: generational and situational. She defined generational poverty as “[families] that have been in poverty for at least two generations” and situational poverty as “a loss of resources due to a particular situation such as death or loss of employment” (p. 47). Based on Payne’s definition of poverty, many of the students who attend school in the district of my inquiry live in generational poverty. According to the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 85% of the students who attend school in the

Midwestern district are eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch. Many of their parents were also eligible to receive free lunch (MDESE, 2010a).

Kunjufu (2006) challenges Payne's idea that poverty is the cause of the academic failure for Black children. He declares, "African American children [living in poverty] can succeed and the gap can be narrowed (p. 3). He believes that a nurturing learning environment, a culturally relevant curriculum, and effective teachers can change the educational landscape of Black children living in poverty. The school of my research inquiry is an excellent example of the findings of Kunjufu's research. Harambee Elementary School students who lived in poverty succeeded academically, as demonstrated by their performance on statewide assessments.

A 2005 evaluation report conducted by the district's research and evaluation department revealed that students of Harambee Elementary School, which had a 85% free and reduced lunch rate, consistently outperformed elementary students district-wide on the State Assessment Program (SAP) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT-9) between the years 2000 and 2004. Despite the findings of the report and the low achievement levels that the Midwestern district has demonstrated, the push to reform the district curriculum and/or teaching methods is attenuated. The Midwestern school district continues to use a Eurocentric curriculum, teaching models, and practices, although they do not reflect the culture and background of the predominantly Black student population.

The Midwestern district is mostly comprised of poor and minority children (Khepera, 2007), with teachers and administrators who function from mental models informed by sameness or "colorblindness" to the detriment of the students (Atwater, 2008). The Midwestern district of this research inquiry has not changed the curriculum or

teaching pedagogy for many years, even though culturally relevant pedagogy has proven to support academic achievement for many students of color (Hale-Benson, 1982). The question of whether ACE has been responsible for bolstering student achievement at the Harambee School, and whether demographically similar schools in the district can likewise benefit, drives this inquiry.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological case study was (a) to understand teachers' insights of CRP through African-centered methods (b) identify strategies (c) describe best classroom practices that led to school outcomes that included meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) and improved student conduct. Heuristics, a form of phenomenology, allowed the researcher to add personal experiences and insight to the inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2002). Case study "is the method of choice when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from context. Such a phenomenon may be a project or program in an evaluation study" (Yin, 2003, p. 4). As the researcher, I had been engaged in the process of using African-centered methods for 16 years and drew on this background to explore the experiences of teachers in the ACE program at Harambee Elementary School. Case study was employed as the major theoretical tradition using the design elements unique to case study research.

The students who attended Harambee Elementary School scored higher than the district and the state in third grade communication arts between 2001 and 2005 (MDESE, 2006). MDESE also reported that the Midwestern school scored higher than the Midwestern district and the state in communication arts every year of the research inquiry (see Figure 2). These results implied that CRP through African-centered methods may

have contributed to the success of the Midwestern students, since many students from similar demographics did not attain the same level of success.

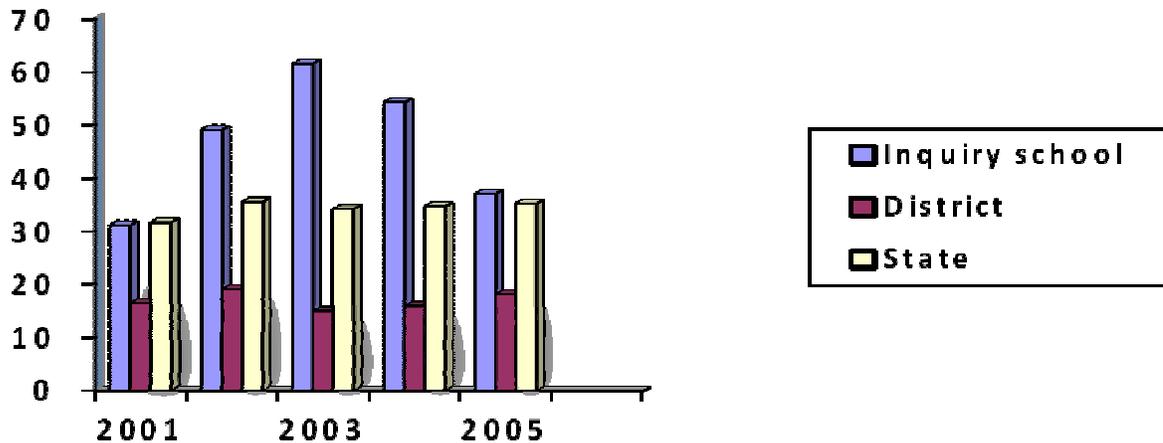


Figure 2. Comparing Harambee School, Midwestern District, and State Averages

Note. Graph model of student test data between 2001 and 2005 that compares the communication arts achievement of students. The chart illustrates that the Harambee students performed better than those at the state and district level.

The landscape of this inquiry focused on issues of social and cultural influence drawn from Vygotsky's (1978) learning and development theory, which emphasized the fact that knowledge takes place inside a social world. Social and cognitive dimensions are dominant in sociocultural theory (Vygotsky). The unit of analysis included findings of the CRP experiences through African-centered methods of elementary teachers. The unit of analysis aligned with Patton's (2002) explanation; he emphasizes, "Particular events, occurrences, or incidents may also be the focus... This means that the primary focus of

data collection will be on what is happening to individuals in a setting and how individuals are affected by the setting” (p. 228).

Significance of the Study

CRP through African-centered methods successfully educated students of color in Harambee Elementary School, yet it was not considered a sustainable reform model to support high levels of academic achievement for Black students. Boute and Hill (2006) affirm, “Rarely is wisdom from Black communities sought and used when seeking best practices for educating students of color” (p. 311). Despite the fact that many students were achieving at Harambee Elementary, the Midwestern district in which the school was located did not incorporate any of the school’s best practices. The Midwestern district continued to implement outdated teaching methods and curricula throughout the district despite the fact that students of color were not achieving academically at acceptable levels to maintain accreditation. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the Midwestern district of my research inquiry was not meeting the academic needs of their students, as demonstrated by low test scores as well as low preparedness for post-secondary education, attendance, and graduation rates (NCES, 2012).

MDESE (2010a) declared that the Midwestern district lost its accreditation in the early 2000s due to low student test scores, though it regained provisional accreditation two years later for meeting two non-academic performance standards. The Midwestern district lost accreditation again in the early 2010s for the same reason that it was lost before: low student achievement (see Table 1).

Table 1

State School Improvement Process

State Performance Standards	Performance standards met	Performance standards not met
9.1 SAP* Grades 3-5 Mathematics		X
9.1 SAP Grades 3-5 Communication Arts		X
9.1 SAP Grades 6-8 Mathematics		X
9.1 SAP Grades 6-8 Communication Arts		X
9.1 SAP Algebra I Mathematics		X
9.1 SAP English II Communication Arts		X
9.3 ACT		X
9.4 Advanced Courses	X	
9.4 Career Education Courses	X	
9.4 College Placement	X	
9.4 Career Education Placement	X	
9.5 Graduation Rate		X
9.6 Attendance		X
9.7 AYP** Subgroup Achievement	X	

*SAP = State Assessment Program.

**AYP = Annual yearly progress.

NAEP (2012) reported that the Midwestern district met only five of the performance standards in the areas of advanced courses offered, career education courses, career education placement, college placement, and bonus improvement (MDESE, 2010a). The District earned bonus improvement points because half of the students who were

disadvantaged or minorities outperformed the majority (MDESE, 2010a). A district must meet at least six performance standards to maintain provisional accreditation status.

According to MDESE (2010a) data, many students who graduate from schools within the Midwestern district are not prepared and are less likely to attend postsecondary institutions. The State Department of Education (2010a) reported the graduation rate for Black students was 60.96% and the dropout rate was 13.7%. That may account for the 39.3% of the district-graduating seniors entering two-year colleges, as compared to 26% entering four-year institutions. These statistics were added proof of the study's significance and the need to provide educators with tangible methods to improve student achievement for Black students.

Audiences likely to benefit from this inquiry are urban teachers, principals, parents, policymakers, and other individuals concerned with public education in the United States. I want to share CRP through ACE with stakeholders that could potentially reform urban public education. My objective is to identify best practices of CRP through African-centered methods that will influence teachers' decisions regarding best practices in urban districts that serve predominantly Black student populations. My personal desire to understand how CRP through African-centered methods improved students' academic and social behavior informed the development of my research questions.

Research Questions

Open-ended research questions serve to guide the proposed inquiry and are connected to the problem, purpose, and theoretical framework of the proposed study. Research questions “give focus to data collection and help organize it as you proceed” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 161) and may change as the study proceeds. Data in the form

of survey, interviews, and documents, as described in detail in the methodology, were used to answer the research questions. The following overarching question and preliminary sub-questions guided this inquiry:

1. How did teachers and other staff members in one African-centered elementary school use culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and positive social behavior?

- a) How do teachers and other staff members describe their experiences implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy in an African-centered school environment?
- b) What are the perceptions of teachers and other staff members regarding how culturally relevant best practices influenced academic and social success?
- c) What factors do teachers and other staff members attribute to the success of their students on standardized achievement tests?
- d) What factors do teachers and other staff members attribute to the students' positive social conduct?

Theoretical Framework

I brought several assumptions to this inquiry about why students of color were not as effective in public schools as compared to their White counterparts. My first assumption was that many teachers, regardless of race, develop low or no academic expectations for students of color, specifically Black students, due to their race. I also assumed that many teachers believed that students in the urban core do not want to learn and misbehave in school because they are poor or their parents are uneducated. My final assumption was that teachers did not believe that introducing culture to Black students

would increase students' opportunities for success. Becoming aware of these potential assumptions prepared me to look more deeply at how CRP through African-centered methods supported student achievement at Harambee Elementary School.

My personal journey to become more knowledgeable about my history as a Black, fueled my desire to grasp how children of color excel academically and socially at Harambee Elementary School. As a child and later as a teenager, I honestly believed that Black people who lived in my urban Midwestern community were destined to be poor, uneducated, and trapped in a cycle of poverty. Many of the people in my community, including my family, lived in poverty and did not even know it. According to United States Census Bureau (2010), 25.8% of Blacks live below the poverty level and of that percentage; more than 38.2% are children. The percentage of White children was about 16%, according to the same report (United States Census Bureau, 2010). All of the children on my block were from single-parent households and lived in generational poverty.

My experiences as a child in the 1980s and 1990s paralleled what was happening across the nation. In the United States in 1991, 118.2 of every 1,000 Black girls between the ages of 15 and 19 became pregnant or teenage mothers (Ventura, 2011). According to the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2012), between 12.1 and 13.8% of Black students dropped out of school throughout the 1990s. The United States Census Bureau (2010) reported that Black men made up 58.1 % of the prison population in the United States during that same period.

Why are so many Black people living in poverty, becoming teenage mothers, and/or being incarcerated? My mother said the plight of many Blacks who lived in my

urban neighborhood was due to a lack of a high-quality education. She said the schools in my community did not know how to educate Black children. She often said, “If you don’t get a good education you are going to end up in prison, pregnant, or living in poverty.” Her profound statement resonated with me throughout my adult life and sparked my curiosity to find out why children who lived in my urban neighborhood were not adequately educated.

In my childhood neighborhood, literacy and poverty existed together. According to NCES (2007), *literacy* is “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (p. 64). NCES conducted a literacy survey of adults who lived in the United States to determine their rates of literacy. Three types of literacy were assessed (prose, document, and quantitative) for adults, age 16 and older, in 1992 and 2003. According to the survey:

- Nearly 50% of adults who functioned in the lowest literacy rates lived in poverty.
- The poverty rate for Black families was three times higher than that for White families.
- Illiterate adults earned almost 50% less than adults who were functioning in the highest literacy levels.
- Nearly 80% of the prison populations are functionally illiterate (NCES, 2007, p. 64).

My mother knew intuitively what the problem was in my urban neighborhood. She knew that if you could not read or write, chances were you would not be able to function effectively in society. The public schools in the urban core of the Midwestern

City where I grew up were not effectively educating children of color, specifically Blacks. Many Black researchers believe that the communities in which Black children live do a better job educating than the public school system (Boute & Hill, 2006).

I am a product of the Midwestern school system of my research inquiry. I attended elementary, middle, and high schools that I whole-heartedly believe did not adequately prepare me for post-secondary education. I experienced firsthand the banking model, Eurocentric curriculums, and traditional teaching practices that did not prepare me for life after high school. I was one of those students who grew up living in poverty, raised by a single parent who was a teen mother, whose future seemed hopeless. According Flanagan (2005):

Daughters of single adolescent mothers are significantly more likely to give birth themselves before the age of 18....They are more likely to grow up in a poor and mother-only family, to live in a poor or underclass neighborhood, and experience high risks to both their health status and potential school achievement. (p. 2)

I could have been a statistic, but my mother was determined that I was going to have a better life than she had. She encouraged me to read books and make up homework for myself, because most days I did not have any. She told me at a very young age that I was going to be the first member of my family to graduate from college. I believed her. When I was in high school, I refused to take a typing class. My counselor told me that I would need typing if I wanted to get a job as a secretary when I graduated from high school. I told my counselor I was not going to be secretary; I was going to college. He looked at me with disbelief. At that moment, I knew I was going to college. In retrospect, I wish I had taken that typing class, because all my college papers had to be typed.

I am a testament that children living in poverty, from a single-parent household, who received an inadequate public education, can change the statistics. I was dedicated

and determined to beat the odds and attend college. I was determined to break the cycle of poverty in which my family had lived for several generations, and that is exactly what I did. I had to work twice as hard as my peers did in college, because I was so far behind. I graduated from college with a degree in elementary education and a master's in guidance and counseling.

I returned to the Midwestern community where I grew up and worked as a teacher for 12 years and a principal for three years, teaching culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods. I made a personal commitment to myself that children from my Midwestern community would have access to a quality education. My goal was to support learning for children who attended school in the Midwestern district to become highly educated and return to their urban communities to make it better, just as I did. I have always been interested in what the research had to offer about ACE. My goal for this research study was to produce findings that support best practices and strategies to increase student achievement for diverse learners.

Maxwell (2007) describes a theoretical or conceptual framework as “the systems of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs research” (p. 33). Maxwell described experiential knowledge as an important part of the conceptual framework, because it allows the background, identity, and experiences of the researcher to be part of the inquiry (Maxwell). I used experiential knowledge to select four areas to construct meaning of this inquiry: (a) Eurocentric hegemony, curriculum and outdated traditional teaching models, (b) effective leadership models, (c) culturally relevant pedagogy, and (d) African-centered pedagogy. These strands comprised the theoretical framework of my study, the foundation knowledge of my research inquiry.

Eurocentric curriculums and outdated teaching methods have been around for many years in the United States, but they have not been successful in educating many students of color. Strong leadership has been one of the missing links to change the “status quo” education system that has become ethnically and culturally diverse. Twenty-first century leaders are needed to reframe education that meets the needs of all learners. These leaders must incorporate reform models such as CRP that have been proven to increase the academic success for students of color (Gay, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRP alone has not provided the Black student the historical background knowledge that is required to make monumental social and academic gains in education (Hilliard, 1997). African-centered education, in turn, should promote high levels of academic achievement for the Black learner.

Eurocentric Hegemony, Curriculum and Outdated Teaching Models

Spring (2010) stresses that the establishment of education serves to continue the “dominance of Anglo-American culture in the United States” (p. 2), thus giving rise to a hegemonic curriculum in the public school system. Other researchers believe traditional teaching models that suggest Eurocentric history and experience have perpetuated hegemonic attitudes and practices (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994). Regardless of why educational hegemony dominates public education, the current system is not improving outcomes for students of color, specifically the academic or social achievement of Blacks (Shujaa, 1994). Furthermore, the levels of student achievement among Blacks continue to decrease (Murrell, 2002) due to lack of cultural empathy, loss in student efficacy for success, limited resources and personnel, and unresponsive cultural curriculum connections.

Madhubuti and Madhubuti (1994) assert hegemonic curricula continue in public education because of racism and international Eurocentric attitudes toward people of color. The status of Blacks in the curriculum and textbooks has not changed significantly throughout history because of these practices. Blacks and other people of color have made notable progress in U.S. society, but still have the greatest poverty and illiteracy rate of any racial group (Madhubuti & Madhubuti). According to Spring (2010), this is attributable to continued dominance of European beliefs and culture in public schools as well as the general marginalization of non-White cultures in society.

Traditional education methods emphasize that the students comes to school with very little knowledge, and it is the teachers' job to teach them what they need to know (Novak, 1998). Furthermore, traditional teaching pedagogy "is associated with large class sizes of students with one teacher, the school day is typically about six hours and thirty minutes, and the students are generally graded by test and quizzes" (Glickman, 1998, p. 38). For example, students of all races and ethnicities learn in a variety of ways; and, from time to time, students like to engage in group activities.

Culturally speaking, engaging in group activities with peers is essential to the way many Black students learn and retain new knowledge (Gay, 2000). In the traditional setting, such socialization might result in a poor grades or disciplinary action, but in an African-centered or culturally relevant class, the teacher might incorporate such cultural predilections into the curriculum (i.e., teaching the students to write by recording individual oral histories). In general, Black students value school and learning. They like to feel a part of the learning community, lessons, and the variety of activities (Gay). It is

not unusual to observe students in ACE schools working in groups while learning, as opposed to individually as in traditional education.

Based on my experiences and observations as a Black student attending urban public schools, and as an educator working with Black children for 17 years, traditional teacher methods limit the Black child's ability to connect with learning and to achieve. I also observed students working in groups collectively who were very engaged in learning. Ladson-Billings (2009) proclaims that conventional teachers who deny the role of culture in education are also those who have mastered the traditional curriculum and believe if it is not working, there must be something wrong with the child.

Leading from the Outside: The Paradigm Shift for the 21st Century Leader

Effective leadership is extremely important to schools that are able to achieve academic and social equality for all students. A leader's beliefs, values, aspirations, and commitments determine their effectiveness (Sergiovanni, 2007). According to the National Institute for School Leaders (NISL), principals are responsible for 25% of the learning that occurs in the schools (NISL, 2012). They have to create a culture and an environment in order for high levels of student achievement to occur. Leaders must establish the appropriate routines for the school and establish strong community relationships (Lambert, 2000). They set the tone for the culture and climate of the school. The school leaders must be willing to use a variety of leadership styles to accomplish the goal of ensuring a quality education for all students. The styles that create effective change in which all students have access to a quality education are: (a) transformative, (b) democratic, (c) socially just, and (d) led by 21st century leadership approaches.

Transformative Leadership

Educational leaders of today must have the knowledge and commitment to improve the quality of education for all students. Practices of social justice must inform their decisions about teaching and learning (Beachum, 2008). Transformative leaders fight for students who attend the schools and the community as well. These types of principals understand that their leadership “transformation goes beyond translation” (Beachum, 2008, p. 57). They establish relationships with all stakeholders. They have open lines of communication so that they will always be informed. Their flexibility allows them to understand what is going on in the moment, but they also use experiences and future expectations to guide decision-making.

Social Justice Leadership

The style of leadership for social justice is similar to those of democratic leaders. Both types of leaders believe in ensuring that every child in every classroom demonstrates respect and has an authentic voice in school. They are both willing to fight for their beliefs. Social justice leaders work even harder to make sure that students are not only experiencing democracy but that they are also equipped with the tools to fight injustice. These leaders believe that injustice anywhere can affect justice everywhere (Marshall & Oliva, 2010).

Social justice leaders are willing to make sacrifices because they understand equality for all is not an easy task for all people. They are passionate about ensuring that their students, parents, staff, and communities have access to equitable opportunities. They know the work is hard, the challenges are many, and the road to justice for all is long. These leaders will stay the course because they are committed to justice for all.

“Taking up the challenge of social justice is not for the faint of heart. It means leaders must hold difficult conversations in their schools and in the community in which they live” (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 48). Social justice leaders demonstrate a connectedness to their communities and work hard to tackle all situations head-on with vigor and unpretentiousness practices.

Democratic Leadership

Democratic school leaders are reciprocal and aim to develop a school community that promotes democracy. This style of leadership engages all stakeholders to have an active voice in the decision-making process. Democratic leaders insist that the ideas of the school community are valued and supported. Democratic leaders are great communicators who are able to share the rationale for decisions that promote effective teaching and learning.

According to Dewey (1967), the democratic school leader ensures that the students connect to the learning through their involvement in the selection of what is being taught. The democratic leader confronts the traditional educational systems that include the banking education methods. The banking model style of teaching demands that the teacher lectures and the student listens. The teacher knows everything and the students are insignificant. The democratic leader must overtly put “opportunities in place” to ensure that students have a voice in school (Beane & Apple, 2007, p. 9). Democratic leaders understand that democracy in education is more than a policy; it is a belief that all individuals have the right to make decisions relevant to their education.

Twenty-first Century Leadership: Pulling It All Together

The 21st century leadership style is a compilation of transformative, democratic, and social justice leadership styles. This type of leader knows that there are a variety of styles to lead the 21st century student. Fullan (2007) affirms that today's school leaders have a huge role in the functionality of the school. They have the ability to make it an effective place for students to learn. Effective leaders are the key to both academic and social changes at the school. Leaders who are willing to make difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions for the sake of the children are effective.

Sustaining an organization over a period of time requires the establishment of a followership that supports the school's vision (Sergiovanni, 2007). The school's vision and mission statement is critical to 21st century leaders because it reflects the values and goals of the school (Fullan, 2007). Creating a school's vision can take several years to achieve, because of the need for stakeholders to "buy in." Nevertheless, the 21st century leader is prepared for the challenge and looks forward to creating an effective school. Fullan declares that the vision has to be more than a statement; it has to be a shared belief among stakeholders (p. 9). The 21st century leader considers the organization to be more than a job; it is a way of life (Sergiovanni). The 21st leader understands leadership is temporary; therefore, the foundation must be strong enough to last well after the leader is gone.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally relevant pedagogy creates a level playing field where all students, regardless of the color of their skin, can achieve (Gay, 2000). The diversified curriculum in CRP allows students to be valued in the learning process, and using students' personal

experiences and background knowledge builds confidence and a greater capacity to learn. CRP approaches education in two ways: (a) intent focus related to self-awareness, character development, values, integrity, and decision making; and (b) content focus related to strong skills, academic excellence, and content knowledge (Nobles, 1998). When teachers address the needs of the “whole” child, the child learns (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Nobles (2000) assert that teachers of CRP must intentionally address the psychological needs of the child to meet the academic needs of the child through the content.

Culturally relevant pedagogy demands that the teacher view the student as having unlimited potential to learn in school and beyond (Nobles, 1998). Effective CRP teachers have a mastery of the core content and are able to infuse or immerse the culture of the students whom they teach into the curriculum. Ladson-Billings (1994) affirms, “Teachers of excellence travel a different route to ensure the growth and development of their children” (p. 15). Effective CRP for teaching is accomplished through professional development, mentors, classroom observations, and coaching. CRP teachers must be willing to do more to attain the student achievement they desire.

CRP also strives to inculcate a sense of empowerment in the student:

“Empowerment translates into academic competence, personal confidence, courage and the will to act” (Gay, 2000, p. 32). Students who believe that they can succeed in school are often more willing to work toward success. Teachers who regularly support CRP demand the best and celebrate differences, and they include accomplishments of their students in the curriculum (Gay). Instilling pride in students through CRP encourages students to take ownership in the school community (Khepera, 2007). Ladson-Billings

(1994) stresses that to “maintain safe, stable, socially and academically sound students,” many school districts have adopted more “culturally inclusive methods” (p. 57).

African-centered Pedagogy Defined

The definition of African-centered pedagogy varies. Khepera (2007) relates that African-centered education is an outgrowth in pedagogy that can be traced back to African’s classical educational models from antiquity. The two-fold method for classical African-centered pedagogy was based in edification and education in order to (a) develop good character and humanity in the learner internalized through cultural precepts, virtues and values and (b) instruct the learner in deep-knowing ways; i.e., critical thinking processes as exemplars to mastery in educational skill sets and excellence in learning.

ACE adopted this belief, as well as the approach as presented by Freire (1993), of centering the child in the “socialization experience as a subject rather than an object” (p. 461), but expanded the belief to place emphasis on the Black child. ACE for this inquiry is defined as centering the Black child in the curriculum as a subject rather than an object, which allows for an inclusionary process, which gives equal representation to all cultural groups rather than one over the other (Khepera, 2007).

Many proponents believe placing the child at the center of the educational experience allows for an inclusionary process, which provides equal representation for all groups rather than one group over or below another (Hilliard, 2000; Khepera, 2000; Nobles, 2000). Other ACE scholars believe that African-centered education is a process to teach children how to change the oppressive social conditions in the United States (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994; Shujaa, 1994). ACE is intentional. The ACE campaign is “related to the chronic failure of the education system to provide equal educational

results and opportunities for African Americans” (Carruthers, 1995, p. 1). ACE provides Black children opportunities to recover, recreate, and achieve academically and socially.

Lee (1994) also asserted that African-centered education encourages balance in U.S. society. Eurocentric hegemonic curricula have been the sole source of information for students of color attending public schools in the U.S. (Murrell, 2002). ACE distills the myths and stereotypes of African and African American people. According to Lee, the primary goal of ACE is to develop students who have a clear understanding of who they are, where they came from, and where they are going. ACE promotes parent and community involvement, student academic and social achievement, and self-identity (Lee, 1994).

African-centered education is more than a curriculum that documents history about Blacks; it is a way of life and a philosophy for many teachers (Shujaa, 1994). Effective teachers of African-centered methods apply the thinking to their personal lives. Shujaa states, “the African-centeredness of the teacher’s thinking determines the African-centeredness of the teaching” (p. 265). Teachers who develop an African-centered way of thinking are more effective in implementing a culturally relevant curriculum (Gay, 2000).

Effective African-centered teachers see themselves as part of the solution and believe that teaching African-centered methods supports student achievement (Shujaa, 1994). The effective ACE teacher centers him/herself in the community of their students, researches topics relevant to their students, reads books about their students’ cultural backgrounds, and embraces African American values. They value their relationships with

students and parents, which often extend outside of school. In addition, they encourage a sense of family and promote unity throughout the school while challenging conventional perceptions of cultural differences and believe there is “one race, the human race, and it has an African origin” (Khepera, 2000, p. 10).

Overview of Methodology

Qualitative research focuses on “assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Many people use qualitative research when “a problem or issue needs to be explored” (Creswell, p. 39). Qualitative inquiry applied to this inquiry explores how teachers and staff members perceived that African-centered teaching methods may have supported high levels of academic achievement and social conduct.” Patton (2002) states, “The credibility of the qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork” (p. 14).

Qualitative research allows for deeper exploration of the issue. It is flexible and interactive (Maxwell, 2007). Merriam (1998) stresses, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). Qualitative research demands “strong commitment to the research problem and demands time and resources” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Qualitative research allows the researcher “to examine all evidence to substantiate the claim” of the inquiry (Creswell, p. 41).

This inquiry was a heuristic phenomenological case study, which centered on understanding the experiences and perspectives of teachers and other staff members

relevant to CRP through African-centered methods in the Harambee Elementary School. According to Patton (2002), “the reports of heuristics researchers are filled with the discoveries, personal insights, and reflections of the researcher” (p. 107). Heuristic inquiry allowed me as the researcher to share my “discoveries, personal insights, and reflections” (Patton, p. 107) about the use of African-centered methods.

Creswell (2007) states, “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system which may include a specific setting or context” (p. 72). Case study was used for this inquiry because the phenomenon under study was not readily distinguishable from its context (Yin, 1993). Similarly, Merriam (2009) declares, “qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (p. 43). This inquiry was particularistic because it focused on a specific situation. The inquiry was also descriptive because it contained literal detailed descriptions of the perceptions and experiences of teachers and/or other staff members related to ACE methods and strategies. Additionally, it was heuristic because it brought about discovery and meaning to CRP through ACE.

This inquiry focused on teacher and staff member experiences and perspectives of African-centered methods and their opinions on most effective strategies for the best student outcomes. The context of each teacher and/or staff member’s experiences facilitated unique personal reflections for the inquiry.

Setting

The research inquiry setting for this inquiry was a K-5 Midwestern urban elementary school between the years 2000 and 2006. These years illustrated the peak of the school’s performance before the school relocated and expanded to a K-9 articulation.

The student enrollment was between 350 and 382 during this time; 99% of students were Black and 1% were White. The percentage of students receiving free/reduced lunch was more than 88% (MDESE, 2006). The teaching staff was diverse; 60% of the teachers identified themselves as Black, 35% identified themselves as White, and 5% identified themselves as “other.”

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of five elementary teachers who worked at the school between 2000 and 2006 and implemented culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods. Each participant served as a single case for this heuristic phenomenological multiple-case study. Of multiple case studies, Yin (2003) states, “multiple cases should be carefully selected so that they replicate each other” (p. 5). The inquiry was a holistic multiple case study because there was only one unit of analysis. This type of case study allowed me to compare these data collected from all participants.

Sampling Techniques

I used snowball or chain sampling and criterion sampling to identify participants for this inquiry. The snowball or chain sampling approach begins by asking well-suited people: “Who knows a lot about _____? Whom should I talk to?” (Patton, 2002, p. 237). I emailed former teachers and staff members of the school with whom I am professionally acquainted, to recommend or suggest other former teachers and/or staff members for this inquiry. The cascading effect of making others aware of the research expanded the pool of potential participants.

I also emailed the former principal and director of the inquiry school to seek recommendations for potential participants who effectively implemented CRP through African-centered methods at Harambee Elementary School between 2000 and 2006 and had worked at the school for at least two years. This is referred to as criterion sampling. Criterion sampling is a useful method of assurance because there was a specific criterion that each participant had to meet before participating in the inquiry. Creswell (2007) states, “All cases must meet some criterion useful for quality assurance” (p. 12). Criterion sampling allowed the researcher to send out surveys to individuals who qualify for participation. Chain or snowball sampling combined with criterion sampling allowed for a multitude of potential participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

This research inquiry used effective qualitative case study methods including documents, surveys, and in-depth interviews. Patton acknowledges that these methods are effective when conducting qualitative research inquiries. During the data analysis phase, a distinctive emphasis was placed on crystallization, a postmodern technique, instead of

triangulation; this allowed me to look at these data from a variety of angles (Ellingson, 2009). Crystallization allowed the researcher to gain insight from participants using a variety of lenses, including poetry, images, metaphors, or collections throughout the study to provide a clearer perspective from the participants of CRP through African-centered methods. This process added depth to the documents, surveys, participant interviews, and responses (Janesick, 2000).

First, I reviewed school documents such as parent newsletters, school handbook, staff memos, and the school's accountability plan. Based on the information I gathered from the document analysis, I developed survey questions. Next, I emailed former staff members of Harambee elementary to obtain email addresses of potential participants. I received the email addresses of 25 potential participants. I emailed the questionnaire surveys to all potential participants to guide my selection of the most qualified participants. Potential participants were asked to return the survey via email within one week. After I received all surveys, I selected five teachers. Each teacher served as a case. I conducted two 30 to 60-minute in-depth interviews with each participant. During data analysis, I coded all documents, responses from surveys, and in-depth interview notes. The data analysis allowed me to gain specific details about CRP through African-centered methods. Furthermore, incorporating crystallization allowed me to connect with these data from a variety of angles.

Conclusion

This chapter detailed the problem and purpose of the inquiry, as well as the research questions, theoretical framework, and a brief overview of the methodology. The objective of this inquiry was to contribute to the current research on CRP through

African-centered methods, by which alternatives to traditional public education may be generated. Chapter 2 provides a review of the related literature with detailed accounts of the research. Chapter 3 presents a detailed description of the research methodology, including a description of the inquiry design, the rationale for qualitative research, and the major approach of a heuristic phenomenological case study. Traditions, setting and participants, sampling techniques, data sources and analysis, and limitations are covered. Chapter 4 includes the data and analysis of the findings from the data analysis. In Chapter 5, recommendations and conclusions are addressed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological case study was to understand teachers' perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods and strategies and/or best practices for implementing such reforms in order to bolster academic success and student conduct. The Midwestern district for this inquiry embraced a traditional teaching and learning method through a Eurocentric curriculum model, traditional teaching methods, and models utilized within the majority of its schools' population, which consisted predominantly of Black students who academically have been unsuccessful.

In the early 1990s, the district for this inquiry opened its first African-centered public school based upon parental and community demand. School leaders, parents, and community members traveled to Africa and visited schools, as well as consulted with experts, educators, and intellectual scholars about effective cultural approaches to pedagogy and African-centered instructional methods. The district in this study was in the midst of seeking academic solutions to closing an existing achievement gap between Black students and their White student counterparts. As a result of the parental and community's strategic approach of African-centered cultural pedagogy as a remedy to closing the academic achievement gap between learners, the district implemented an African-centered teaching and learning framework in a K-5 elementary school setting.

This inquiry focuses on how pedagogy influences student learning. Pedagogical theory emphasizes how teachers develop an understanding of what is occurring in the classroom, socially and academically. Murrell (2002) confirms that pedagogical theory is

how teachers actually teach. He states that it is “an interpretive and generative framework” (p. 59). It allows teachers to gain a clear account of what is occurring in the classroom so that they can make effective decisions that affect student achievement (Murrell). What teachers are going to teach and how they deliver instruction to students are important aspects of pedagogical theory. Pedagogical theory is a reflective practice that attempts to teach the “whole” child. Murrell maintains that it is a holistic and interactive way of teaching that can affect diverse student populations.

Murrell’s (2002) theory is applicable because according to the United States Department of Commerce (2012), by the year 2060, the American Hispanic population will double from 53.3 million to 128.8 million, and the African American population will rise from 41.2 million to 61.8 million during the same period (Ortman, 2012). The Census (2010) projection suggests that the American White population will decrease during this same period by 20.6 million. Memmot (2012) reported that by 2043, the United States would face a racial shift, with minorities becoming the majority within the nation and the current racial majority assuming minority status. This raises questions about how American pedagogical practices will prepare U.S. schools for such a sweeping transformation in educational demographics.

This inquiry examined a period when the district was unaccredited and looking for reform models that would improve student achievement. Culturally relevant pedagogical practices were at the forefront of efforts to regain accreditation. The inquiry district needed an effective model that had community support and a proven record of accomplishment (MDESE, 2006). The inquiry district completed an internal evaluation of the inquiry school. The findings of the evaluation revealed that the inquiry school

outperformed district elementary schools in all areas. More students who attended the inquiry school performed in the top two categories of the SAP (proficient and advanced) and had fewer students performing in the bottom categories of the same assessment (step 1 and progressing) (MDESE, 2006).

Members of the community supported culturally relevant pedagogy because “it does for Native American, Latino, Asian American, African American, and low income students what traditional instructional ideologies and actions do for middle-class European Americans” (Gay, 2000 p. 24). This type of pedagogy engages all learners, making learning personal and relevant. An African-centered method narrows the focus of CRP to center on the African American learner specifically.

Review of Literature

According to Galvan (2006), there are two main purposes or goals of a literature review for a dissertation. The first goal is to provide a comprehensive and up to date review of the topic. The second goal is to demonstrate a thorough command of the field one is studying. This review of literature explores what we currently know about culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods and how CRP contributes to improving the education for students of color, specifically African American learners. Through this inquiry and review of literature, several themes are explored: (a) Eurocentric hegemonic perspectives inherent to traditional teaching models and curriculum; (b) effective educational leadership styles; (c) culturally relevant pedagogy in teaching and learning; and (d) the relevancy of authentic education reform through African-centered pedagogy and praxis. These topics are comprehensively reviewed and provide relevance to this inquiry.

Eurocentric Hegemonic Perspectives, Traditional Education Models, and Curriculum

In the beginning of education in the U.S., experience was the first teacher. The country relied on agriculture as one of the main sources for its economic existence (Cubberley, 1909). European boys and girls received most of their knowledge and education by working on the farms where they resided. Working in the fields, operating machinery, and connecting with nature were critical parts of their early training (Cubberley). They were able to create and develop the provisions they needed to survive. Technologies and industry did not have a large impact on daily farm life. Hands-on experience was one of the keys to economic advancement. This period did not last long; as technology improved, so did the need for a well-educated work force.

By the early 1800s the quality of daily life of many Americans had improved. They did not have to create everything by hand anymore. They had access to “sewing machines, steamboats, and the railroads” (Cubberley, 1909, p. 6). The things that people needed the most were no longer a luxury; many Americans considered them a right. With all the positive changes that were occurring during the mid-1800s, the need for a more qualified work force became evident. Cubberley wrote:

From a little and an isolated Federation with an uncertain future we have grown into a strong nation and finally a great world power, and we are situated in a Centre of the theatre of action in the future. (p. 8)

The American population was growing; therefore they had to develop an educational institution that could support the growth. According to Cubberley (1909), the American class system was born during this time. The more education a person had, the higher class they were in American society. This was the time Hegemonic beliefs began

to surface. He states, “The early people were largely English stock. Their ancestors had brought with them English customs and observances, English ways of thinking, and the English attitude toward religion and law” (p. 11). English dominance was the start of hegemonic practices in the U.S. education system.

European Dominance Unraveled

In the mid 1800s, the U.S. was a melting pot. Immigrants traveled from all over the world to settle in the U.S. The early immigrants such as the Irish, Germans, and English were semi-educated and assimilated well into the culture of the U. S. (Cubberley, 1909). The immigrants who came after them were a different story. They traveled from places that were to the north and east of Europe. According to Cubberley, these immigrants were not educated and lacked structure and discipline. This is how first-wave European dominance began. Cubberley maintains that the Europeans living in America had to find a way to assimilate these new immigrants. He said the following regarding European hegemony:

Our task is to break up these groups or settlements, to assimilate and amalgamate these people as a part of our American race, and implant in their children, so far as can be done, the Anglo Saxon conception of righteousness, law and order, and popular government. (p. 15)

Many of the European hegemony and social dominance influences prevail in U.S. teaching and learning models today. The U.S. school system originated as a means to convey shared European fundamentals of learning that supported the continuance of dominance through reading, writing, and religion (Howard, 1999). Education was transferred through religion. According to Frasier (2001), during colonial times the primary purpose of education was to provide a foundation for religion. Spring (2001)

emphasizes that cultural and religious dominance began because England felt their religion was superior to those of other races.

Many religious wars were fought for the same reason. The English felt their way of life should be replicated by all others. The more wars in which they were victorious, the further the superior grasp spanned (Spring, 2001). The English did not stop with religion. They knew the country that controlled the institution of religion could control the education system. They needed to control the education because it was the pathway to children. It was easier to reform children than it was to assimilate adults.

Cultivating Non-Europeans

As mentioned earlier, conforming races of people to the beliefs of the dominant race has been going on for many years, in and outside the U.S. Hegemony did not begin in North America, but flourished there. The Native American Indians were one of the many casualties of English dominance. The dominance was justified by the English because they believed they were culturally and religiously superior (Spring, 2001). The Native Americans were unable to defeat the aggressive actions of the English, so yet again they prevailed.

According to Spring (2001), Native Americans were forced to abandon their language, customs, and beliefs to become more Americanized. The English knew that removing the culture from Native Americans would remove their spirit. The English did this in a variety of ways, according to Spring. The most strategic method used was as follows: (a) segregation and isolation, (b) forced change of language, (c) curriculum content that reflected culture of dominant group, (d) textbooks that reflected culture of dominant group, (e) denial of cultural or religious expression by dominant group, and (f)

use of teachers from dominant group. The method was effective in assimilating the beliefs of Native Americans into those of Americans.

Similar strategies were used with the African American, Puerto American, and other ethnic groups. The dominant culture used textbooks, teaching methods, and curriculum that reflected the culture of the dominant group. This was a way to erase the contributions of one race while extending the control of another race. These strategies did not improve the educational outcomes or the self-esteem of the students of the non-dominant groups. They did just the opposite; they reinforced the supremacy of the dominant group (Spring, 2001).

Anderson and Kharem (2009) state that the foundation of public education incorporates “racism, discriminatory practices, compromise, and expediency with regard to indigenous people, Africans and those of African descent” (p. 7). As illustrated in the above scenario, that fact is still true today. Racial power and privilege become anchors that support the institutional approach to underlying educational values and beliefs. Therefore, hegemony reflects power relationships within society that subscribes and preordains the educational necessities to ensure that status quo relationships continue to exist. Schools as systems become direct extensions and function to maintain prevailing attitudes and power relationships in society. The banking model, as described by Freire (1993) and Kotter (2012), supports these ideas.

The Banking Education Model

In the banking model, the teacher has power over the student as the owner of knowledge; the teacher lectures and does most of the talking, while students listen passively, accepting unquestionably whatever the teacher says (Freire, 1993). Realizing that many students of color do not learn best using the banking model approach to education has led many researchers to believe that this model perpetuates the “dominance of Anglo-American culture in the United States,” (Spring, 2001, p. 2), and therefore, a more collaborative model is necessary. The banking model emphasizes that the learner is a blank slate and the act of educating is to deposit or put knowledge into the empty container of their mind and fill them up with information (Freire).

The beliefs that many cultural educators and practitioners hold are in direct conflict with the banking model. Cultural pedagogy and African-centered teaching and learning view culture as having value, worth, and meaning. The learner as an extension of his or her culture brings experience to the classroom through their cultural heritage, and the education process validates, acknowledges, and respects this cultural orientation into the school learning process. Thus, students contribute to and reciprocate the teacher’s teaching and learning goals. The oppositional theory and practice found within the banking educational model deemphasizes cultural meaning and places the student outside of pedagogy. In the banking model, the teacher’s pedagogy views the students and their culture as objects outside of fundamental teaching theory and neutralizes the students’ culture as non-essential to teaching and the learning processes.

Today, most contemporary educators agree that students bring diverse heritages, backgrounds, and learning needs into the classroom. Additionally, those same educators

agree that the culture of students and styles of learning are diverse and critical to successful teaching and learning. Teachers need to be able to collaborate with other students and teachers to maximize learning. Past teaching practices allowed teachers to own the classroom and make most classroom decisions, but today's classrooms demand that teachers mutually invest students into learning as stakeholders so that they collectively facilitate classroom decisions, having "buy in and ownership" of what is being taught.

Teachers must become facilitators of learning, and students should have an active and authentic voice in the classroom. The teachers of today must be intentional risk takers and be able to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all children. They also must have an active role in the school. Murrell (2002) explains that conventional education models, including the banking model, focus on the teacher and academic achievement while disregarding the cultural and social experiences of the students. Shujaa (1994) states, "The failure to take into account differing cultural orientations and unequal power relations among groups that share membership in a society is a major problem in conceptualizations that equate schooling and education" (p. 14). For the most part, U.S. schools reflect the dominant culture's models, perspectives, beliefs, and values (Hilliard, 2000; Nobles, 1998; Shujaa, 1994) and do not take into consideration the cultural norms. They reject, deviate from, or devalue the learning rituals or styles of non-dominant racial groups. A variety of reform models have been attempted to counter the banking model style of teaching including Multiculturalism and Democratic education. Both models claim to immerse all students into the curriculum to support a high level of student achievement.

Reform Models

The word “reform” has been used for many years in the U.S. public education system. Educators and lawmakers are aware of the inequalities in public education in the U.S. (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). During the 1980s and 1990s there was a government effort to reform the current education system. The efforts became prevalent in 1983 when the Secretary of Education, Terrell Bell, created the National Commission on Education Excellence. Shortly after the creation of the commission, a report on education was written, entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The report was intentional in addressing how the nation can become more competitive in the world market place, but it failed to address the hegemonic overtones present in the U.S curriculum.

Nieto (1992) believes that the culture of the students should have been a part of the Commission of Education report. She wrote a report in 1992, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* as a means to shed light on multicultural education and its effect on the growing diverse student population. She affirmed that there is not one approach that will ensure student achievement for all, but that multiculturalism is a starting point.

Every student needs to be included in the curriculum and should not feel inferior because they are not part of the dominant culture. Nieto (2002) proclaims that teachers must be willing to work to include the culture of their students in the curriculum. Multicultural education affirms that the experiences of all immigrants are relevant in American society. The reform model confirms that the education of a person should not depend on the color of their skin or the language that they speak. Multicultural practices

cannot be presented as separate, because they are not. They have to be infused within the traditional Eurocentric curriculum to make an impression on student achievement.

Democratic education is another reform model that attempted to redefine traditional public education. This reform model provides students with freedom to learn, grow, and prosper (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Students who are exposed to a democratic education generally are more familiar with the concepts of democracy in the United States. Through a democratic process, students are exposed to decision making skills. Students who are exposed to a democratic education have a genuine “voice” in the classroom and are accountable for their learning. A democratic education provides freedom in the classroom that creates real world experiences. This approach to learning is different from most traditional models.

Glickman (1998) argues that in order for a society to be democratic, three components must exist: “equality, liberty, and fraternity” (p. 3). In the U.S., equality is not a reality for the non-dominant culture. A traditional thought of liberty for all has not occurred in the U.S. The idea of fraternity is not realistic because of the aforementioned reasons (Glickman). Advocates of Democratic education question the premise that democracy can be rationalized in American education. They suggest that a democratic education can improve opportunities that value the rights and freedoms of all American citizens, including the rights of children. The U.S. government is attempting to ensure that all students are receiving an equitable education. The government approaches reform efforts differently than educators and administrators in the field.

Assessments and No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law, in part to rectify the ongoing discrepancy in test scores between students of color and their White counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The renewed law intended to: (a) increase accountability for student achievement, (b) focus on practices that work to increase achievement for students, (c) reduce bureaucracy and increase flexibility, and (d) empower parents. The law sought to ensure that every child in every classroom had access to a quality education and held schools accountable based on students' scores on standardized tests, establishing a means to measure teacher and principal effectiveness via disaggregated student test scores and school performance (Ravitch, 2010). However, as Anderson and Kharem (2009) assert, "NCLB is one of the most controversial federal initiatives since the 1954 *Brown v. Board Supreme Court* decision outlawing racial segregation in public education" (p. xv).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) program began sampling student test data in 2002, in accordance with NCLB. According to NAEP's findings, NCLB failed to improve student achievement. For example, in 2009, 67% of fourth graders were reading at a basic reading level and 33% were reading at proficient or advanced level, and there had been no significant growth since 2002 (NAEP, 2011). Among eighth graders, scores had increased only by 1% between 2005 and 2009 (NAEP). High school seniors actually fared better on standardized tests prior to the implementation of NCLB: 80% of twelfth graders scored at or above basic in 1992 compared to only 74% in 2009 (NAEP).

Educational reform methods and models are imperative as we attempt to change the educational landscape of public education in the U.S. I posit that educational leadership is equally as important. In order to sustain reform, leaders must be prepared to extend their knowledge about such efforts to ensure they are meeting the needs of all students. The next section describes the type of educational leader that is required to implement such changes and reform models.

Leading from the Outside: The Paradigm Shift for the 21st Century Leader

Leadership has many layers that contribute greatly to the school's culture and overall success (Sergiovanni, 2007). The objective of school leaders must be to create an environment in which all students have an opportunity to achieve academically and socially. Lawmakers and educators have speculated for many years that there is a link between strong leadership and effective schools. Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education, affirms the following:

Nothing is more important. There's no such thing as a high-performing school without a great principal. It is impossible. You simply can't overstate their importance in driving student achievement, in attracting and retaining great talent to the school. (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2010, p. 2)

Effective leaders create an environment in which high standards and expectations are the norm for teachers and students. Such leaders challenge the educational norms (Wagner & Kegan, 2006) and create effective learning communities. Leaders who challenge the "status quo" are "creative non conformers" (p. 14). They are willing to reform ineffective educational practices that do not benefit all students and to create a school culture that challenges the status quo and promotes academic and social excellence. I offered three leadership styles: transformational, democratic, and constructivist styles of leadership that will support the effective 21st century leader.

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership is essential in order to create a school community that promotes an equitable education for all learners. The transformative leader's vision must be inclusive of all stakeholders, or it just becomes a list of ideas (Kotter, 2012). Theorists believe that these types of leaders are social activists who fight for causes that will help make significant changes in societal discrimination (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). Quantz, Rogers, and Dantley (1991) defined a transformative leader as "those who are able to help others to clarify their own world, to develop a commitment to democracy and emancipation and to have courage and desire to work for the empowerment of all people" (p. 104). These leaders believe that injustice anywhere can affect justice everywhere.

Transformative leaders scrutinize "how institutionalized theorists, norms, and practices in schools in society lead to social, political, economic, and educational inequities" (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 20). These leaders oppose hegemonic leadership practices and promote models of reform. One of my mentors instantly came to mind as I researched the characteristics of transformative leaders. She was a passionate leader who ensured access to a quality education could be obtained by all, regardless of race. Dantley (2010) affirms that these types of merits serve as signifiers to ensure that race, gender, and class are at the forefront of debate (p. 2). She was driven by personal goals that emphasized institutional goals to ensure children of color received a fair, equitable education. She is an advocate for all children, but specifically Black children because she works directly with them. She held the qualities that Marshall and Oliva (2010) affirm transformative school leaders must possess, such as conviction and a commitment to equality.

Transformative leaders have a clear reference to the ideas that traditional education has fostered, but work to reconstruct them to make them more equitable (Dantley, 2010). Nevertheless, the transformative leader, such as my mentor, knows that in order to make a difference, things in society have to change, and change was not easy. Deutschman (2005) posed a question to over a thousand people: “What if a well-informed, trusted authority figure said that you had to make difficult and enduring changes in the way you think and act or you would die” (Deutschman, p. 2). According to Deutschman, many of the people stated that they would rather die than to make significant changes to their way of life.

Transformative leaders are willing to make adjustments that create justifiable educational entrée for all learners (Sergiovanni, 2007). These leaders ensure that diversity is celebrated in the school environment, not just accommodated to meet a public policy (Dantley, 2010). These leaders emphasize academic and social progress that provides a voice for students who have not been heard in an academic setting. They permit the powerless to become powerful by becoming leaders themselves (Foster, 1986). They insist that everyone is relevant, and their story and history must be validated through educational institutions.

Transformative leaders work collaboratively to fight for change not just for their schools, but for schools everywhere. They will grind until every urban school is equivalent to every suburban school. This type of leader will continue the struggle until schools are able to make collaborative decisions regarding staffing, curriculum, and other matters that relate to educating children. Transformative leaders understand that justice

for all is more than just a slogan. Quantz et al. (1991) state this about transformative leadership:

It requires juxtaposing forthrightly its basic ideas against the traditional scientific, quantitative, technical, and hierarchy ideology which is driving today's calls for reform. In other words, it requires a candid grappling with social, economic, and political dilemmas the schools are currently facing. (p. 98)

Transformative leaders understand what is at stake and are willing to make sacrifices to ensure equitable access to a quality education for all learners (Sergiovanni, 2007). They are willing create school environments in which culture is celebrated, diversity flourishes, and injustices are not acceptable (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Transformative school leaders use their schools to create environments in which students feel safe, respected, capable, and in which they understand how they can influence the world through social justice.

Social Justice Leaders

Transformative and social justice leadership styles both require leaders to lead from the outside to create a socially just school in the inside (Sergiovanni, 2007). (Sergiovanni, 2007) In other words, leaders must understand what is happening in the world around them to impact what is going on in the classroom. This type of leader is necessary to continue educational reform. Marshal and Oliva (2010) assert that most effective leaders are willing to have strong discussions with the internal and external school community to promote social justice. They believe that “taking up the challenge of social justice is not for the faint of heart. It means leaders must hold difficult conversations in their schools and in the community in which they live” (p. 48).

There is an abundance of relevant literature for social justice leaders, but not enough to support social justice school leaders (Theoharis, 2010). According to

Theoharis, to develop a theory that supports social justice for school-based leaders, you must have a clear understanding of what social justice means for school-based leadership. Social justice leadership is defined as, “Principals that advocate, lead and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States” (Theoharis, p. 333).

Many researchers have conducted studies about social justice that support leaders in general. Theoharis (2004) conducted a research study that is pertinent for school-based leaders that attempted to answer the following questions: (a) In what way are principals advancing social justice in schools? (b) What countervailing pressures do justice-driven principals encounter in their justice work? and (c) What strategies do principals use to advance social justice in light of the countervailing pressures in public schools? The unit of analysis for this study was the school principal. The study focused on principals who came to the field with a calling to do social justice work. The study also expanded to explore their accomplishments and struggles. His goal was to develop a theory of social justice for school-based leaders (Theoharis).

The methodology he employed was a qualitative positioned subject approach. He states:

The positioned subject approach allowed me to take in the varied perspectives of a particular group of educational leaders and interpret their experiences through the lens of their own particular setting, situation and social justice goals their leadership maintained for their schools. (p. 5)

The tradition he used was influenced by feminist and postmodern theory but relied more heavily on critical theory (Theoharis, 2010).

The study showcased the experiences of seven school principals who employed a social justice leadership style. He recorded all interviews and kept field notes to maintain reliability. His findings revealed the following:

1. All principals had a commitment to equity and justice which created better educational environments; and

2. The leaders advanced social justice and enacted their own resistance in for ways: raising student achievement, improving school structures, re-centering and enhancing staff capacity, and strengthening school culture/community (Theoharis, 2010).

Leaders who follow the social justice trajectory work hard for all stakeholders, with respect and dignity. They understand that racism and other discriminatory practices exist in education, and they are willing to challenge them. They understand what social justice means and work to ensure that their personal beliefs are in tune with their educational ones. Marshal and Oliva (2010) state that social justice is “fairness, fair play, everyone operating on a certain code of ethical conduct and standards and actually following up and being consistent in terms of candor, frankness, and treating the other persons you’d like to be treated” (p. 93).

Leaders must have a clear vision and must monitor what is occurring in their schools, both academically and socially (Kotter, 2012). Leaders who do so have a greater opportunity to be socially just. Even though leaders for social justice know what is occurring in their schools and are willing to challenge the status quo, when students are not successful, they are held accountable.

Marshal and Oliva (2010) assert, “Linking accountability with social justice requires such adaptive work—to hold difficult conversations to probe deeper when

students fail. Who is ultimately accountable when high numbers of students fail? For what are they held accountable?" (p. 49). Social justice leaders ask these types of questions all the time because they really want to know the answers; their goal is for all children to be successful.

Social justice leaders come from all occupations and all nationalities. It has been stated that many of the most effective social justice leaders have a clear sense of cultural insight. Sanders-Lawson, Smith-Campbell, and Benham (2006) state, "As scholars of color, we have benefited from this inclusive invitation to explore alternative views of knowing and doing leadership, and yet we marvel at the peril of this vibrant dialogue" (p. 75). Many Blacks have been denied, and continue to be denied, leadership roles, resources, and other lead responsibilities in schools due to discrimination, stereotypes, and ignorance (Sanders-Lawson et al., 2006).

Leaders for social justice can be anyone who is willing to lead by example, challenge the status quo way of thinking, ensure that all students are included, and have a desire to ensure that all cultures are treated fairly and equitably in the school setting. I end this section with a quote from Marshal and Oliva (2010), because it embodies the meaning of social justice:

Critical interrogation is a moral endeavor that is linked to social justice. Through this process, current, as well as prospective, school leaders personally grapple with issues of race, class, and gender; significance of difference; and the marginalizing strategies of institutions as perpetuating elitist notions of the dominant culture. (p. 24)

Leaders for social justice are informed by the merits of democratic leadership. They embrace democracy as an essential component of student achievement.

Democratic Leadership

Like transformative and social justice leadership styles, democratic leadership reflects all stakeholders in their decision making regarding school matters. The complex idea of democratic schools and leadership has an array of definitions that have developed over time, while the simple idea is to ensure that all stakeholders have an authentic voice. Apple and Beane (2007) interpret democratic education as an experience that engages students in “real life” democracy. Dewey (1967) stresses that democratic leaders ensure that education is connected to the learner. Depending on the school, location, and participant, the definition can vary greatly. I believe the overall premise of democratic leadership is that leaders who are democratic provide students an equal role in the decision making process.

The Institute for a Democratic Education in America (IDEA) infers that a democratic leader is a leader who ensures every human being has an opportunity to participate fully in a healthy democracy (Graves, 2011). IDEA also said that democratic leadership provides students with the essential tools that they need to live in a democratic society. They believe that in order to function in society, students must be able to have a democratic voice (Graves).

A democratic leader provides an opportunity for students to have an active role in the school. The leader provides students the opportunity for engagement in the type of learning that prepares them for real world experiences (Marshall & Oliva, 2010). Furthermore, democratic leaders collaborate with students to ensure they are making decisions regarding their education. Democratic leaders create opportunities whereby students can practice democracy in a school setting. By creating democracy in the

classroom, students become better stewards of democracy in humanity. Bean and Apple (1995) assert that teaching students to think and understand the essence of democracy will provide democratic leaders of tomorrow.

Democratic leaders support the creation of classrooms that allow teachers and students to discuss the curriculum openly and honestly. In traditional schools, children must follow direction, not question authority, and speak only when given permission. This is oppositional to an authentic democracy. According to Nieto (2002), democratic leaders allow classrooms to function in a democratic manner. Students who are involved in decision making at school will transfer what they learn into helping their community. Furthermore, students who understand democracy will be able to make decisions when given the opportunity outside of school (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Leaders who provide students an authentic voice to express their views in a democratic manner become better stewards of democracy. These skills are in essential as we move through the 21st century.

Leadership in the 21st Century: Pulling It All Together

A great leader must be willing to embrace all of the aforementioned leadership styles to create a collaborative school culture that supports a diverse student population. The 21st century leader must be able to incorporate transformative, social justice, and democratic characteristics to be an effective leader. Their ability to sustain an organization over a period of time and continue to develop leaders internally will be challenging. They must rely heavily on their transformational skills. They must be committed to their social justice skills to create high levels of achievement to meet the needs of all students.

The 21st century leader facilitates the creation of a shared vision of success for diverse students and is willing to work hard to ensure that equitable educational access is achieved. They must use their skills of democracy to ensure all stakeholders have an authentic voice. This skill should be used to develop a mission statement that ensures all students are college ready before they graduate from school. Fullan (2007) emphasizes that “leaders must create goals, values, and missions that become deeply shared throughout the organization” (p. 8). Stakeholder support is not an easy task, because the 21st century leader requests “buy in” from all participants. Fullan states that the vision has to be more than a statement; it has to be a shared belief among stakeholders (p. 9).

The effective 21st century leader considers the organization not just a job, but a way of life, by establishing collaborative relationships with all stakeholders (Sergiovanni, 2007). One of the most important characteristics of the 21st century leader is trust. This leader must be trustworthy to be successful, because the 21st century student will demand it. Fullan (2007) declares, “at its most basic level, trustworthiness had to do with concern for relationships combined with concern for task” (p. 109). The leader must promote the child in the educational process to endure the test of time because a strong foundation will last well after the leader is retired.

From my own experiences as a 21st century leader in an urban school, leaders must be willing to go the extra mile to ensure their students are learning academically and socially (Sergiovanni, 2007). They have to be much more than a manager of people or a school building—they have to be a leader of leaders. They must continuously study new ideas relevant to student achievement and establish a school culture that promotes excellence. Effective leaders understand that sometimes they have to become a follower

to be most effective (Sergiovanni). Effective leadership requires rethinking the role of leadership and sharing new ideas and concepts with all stakeholders. The leader's role is to engage stakeholders in meaningful professional development and support professional learning communities to improve the craft of a school leader and the skills of high quality teachers.

A requisite of a 21st century principal is to offer imaginative and thoughtful dialogue of key concerns in education today. The aforementioned skills, if incorporated, will ensure the success of the school-based leader. Mills (2002) acknowledges that the 21st century principal must be accomplished at generating dedicated groups that can benefit the school. She states, "If principals are expected to do it all, we can be assured of mediocre performance, not because they aren't capable but because we have asked them to be superhuman" (p. 5). A lot of demands are placed on the 21st century leader, but the reward is having high levels of student academic and social achievement for all students, regardless of their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or class.

The National Association of School Boards of Education (NASBE) Study Group on School Leadership (1999) stated, "Good principals are more important than ever" (p. 2). I posit that it is not enough to be a good principal, individuals have to be great principal to acquire the desired levels of student achievement (Collins, 2005). Principals who are able to encompass transformative, socially just, and democratic skills into their leadership style will be better prepared to embrace reform models such as CRP and African-centered methods.

Embracing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

The 21st century leader is able to embrace a reform model that celebrates diversity while offering high levels of academic and social achievement for many underserved groups of students. Reform models that tell “his” story or “her” story, but never “our” story are not contributing to the dream of equality. CRP is one model of reform that emphasizes the contributions of all cultures and groups. CRP refers to practices that center around the teaching of children and their culture. Gay (2000) states, “culturally responsive teaching is about teaching, and the teaching of concern is that which centers classroom instruction in multiethnic cultural frames of reference” (p. xix). This terminology is widely used in many districts around the country that strive to make the connection between a child’s culture and education.

Ladson-Billings (1994) states that culturally relevant teaching is more than just teaching students about their culture. CRP allows students to become a part of learning socially, academically, and spiritually by using the culture of the students to make meaning from the content (Hale-Benson, 1982). If students are going to be involved in the learning of the dominant culture, they must see how their culture is interrelated to achieve academic success (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994). Additionally, the use of physical space, including desk arrangement, teacher-to-student position, and student-to-student position, is important in an effective culturally relevant classroom (Gay, 2000).

Active Learning Classroom Model

Effective classroom models have the potential to support active student learning. Walker, Brooks and Christopher (2010) studied whether the classroom environment had an impact on student learning. Two questions guided the onset of the study:

- (1) Holding the pedagogical approach constant, what is the relationship between the type of learning space and (a) student learning outcomes, (b) instructor and student behavior, and (c) student perceptions of the learning experience?
- (2) Holding the learning space constant, what is the relationship between the type of pedagogical approach and (a) student learning outcomes and (b) students' perceptions of the learning experience? (Walker et al., 2010, p. 3)

The researchers furnished the active learning classroom (ACL) with large circular tables that accommodated nine students with computers. The classroom design allowed students to communicate and work easily together. The students could use markers and White boards to take notes and share information (Walker et al., 2010). The classroom design in the ACL study was demographically similar to the elementary school in my inquiry. Students worked in small groups to communicate and solve problems collectively. Communication is important in CRP using African-centered methods because student input is critical to teaching and learning. Gay (2000) stresses, "The absence of shared communicative frames of reference, procedural protocols, rules of etiquette, and discourse systems makes it difficult for culturally diverse students and teachers to genuinely understand each other and for students to fully convey their intellectual abilities" (p. 81).

Blended Elementary Classroom Model

Abate (2004) conducted a study similar to Walker et al. (2010) to determine if a combination of face-to-face and online web instruction would affect student learning. She declares that both types of instruction support student achievement. She emphasizes, “The traditional face-to-face elementary classroom imparts the social contact that children need to guide their learning while online, or web based, learning offers flexibility” (p. 1). She further emphasizes that young students must have a connection with their instructor in order to connect with the online web instruction. The instruction has to be student friendly and relevant to the needs of the students (Abate).

The blended classroom model, as in the ACL model, requires that the teacher is an active participant in order for student learning to occur. In the blended classroom model, the teacher is responsible for setting up the classroom and motivating the students to use technology in and outside the classroom. The teacher must monitor the student interest and engagement to ensure that all students are learning.

The blended classroom can be effective in certain classroom environments and ineffective in other environments. For example, students who have access to internet at home would likely have greater success than students who did not have access. The findings of the research were inconclusive. The majority of students who participated in the blended classroom rated their experience favorably, but the researcher needed more data to determine if the blended classroom was an effective model.

The arrangement of the classroom and student-to-student interactions affects student achievement. Teacher-to-student relations, including unconscious uses of the physical space, also influenced student success (Walker et al., 2010). The use of

technology, face-to-face relationships, flexibility, and teacher engagement may affect student learning (Abate, 2004). Gay (2000) also proclaims that teacher behaviors “knowingly or unknowingly” affect student behaviors and achievement.

Culture is relevant when it provides a foundation for students. Students perform better when they see themselves in the curriculum and are a part of the instruction. According to Gay (2000), “culture is at the heart of all we do in the name of education, whether that is curriculum, instruction, administration, or performance assessment” (p. 8). Educators must be open to new ideas and forms of educating and assessing children. All children can benefit from learning about their culture (Khepera, 2007).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Unpacked

According to Ladson-Billings (1998), CRP capitalizes on the uniqueness of the students’ cultures. She states, “Culturally relevant teaching uses the students’ culture in order to maintain it and transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture” (p. 17). Gay (2000) affirms, “It is at once a routine and a radical proposal. It is routine because it does for the Native American, Latino, Asian American, African American, and low-income students what traditional instructional ideologies and actions do for middle-class European Americans” (p. 28). CRP levels the academic “playing field,” making education relevant so that all students can and will be successful.

Ladson-Billings (1994) conducted an ethnographic study that included eight teachers (five Blacks and three Whites) in the 1988-1989 and 1989-1990 school years to learn what successful teachers of African American students do to achieve academic and social success. Ladson-Billings (1994) claims that she was concerned more with

“teaching ideology and common behaviors, not individual teaching styles” (p. 13) to acquire a better understanding of the “art and craft of teaching” (p. 13).

Ladson-Billings (1994) used non-traditional measures to secure teacher participants for her study; she talked to parents to help her select participants and school administrators. The parents and administration focused on key areas to make teacher nominations: academic and cultural excellence, classroom management, discipline, attendance, and parent and student satisfaction (Ladson-Billings).

Ladson-Billings (1994) looked for trends among the teachers she observed and interviewed. One trend that she noticed was that teachers did see color among their students and they embraced it. One teacher she interviewed stated, “Teachers must take care not to ignore color” but embrace the “journey toward acknowledging and valuing differences” (Ladson Billings, p. 31). Another participant believed that the teacher must understand the community of learners in and outside the classroom. She stated “ we have to have a sense of family, of ‘teamness’ and when we see ourselves as a team that works together, we can do anything” (p. 40). Yet another teacher felt that CRP created a sense of believing and validating that the student was an important part of the school. She stated, “They’re so smart but so few teachers recognize it. I am so afraid they will meet the same fate as last year’s class” (p. 121). Ladson-Billings’ (1994) research study suggests that acknowledging differences, creating a sense of community, and validating the students’ abilities are important in CRP.

Curriculum and Instruction

The goal of CRP is to enable students of color to achieve at high levels through “academic success, cultural affiliation, and personal efficacy” (Gay, 2000, p. 111). The

curriculum is one of the most important factors in enabling children of color to succeed. Furthermore, children must understand how their experiences at home are relevant to the curriculum at school. Student engagement becomes easier to attain when the curriculum meets the students' personal need of belonging. "Curriculum content should be seen as a tool to help students assert and accentuate their present and future powers, capabilities, attitudes, and experiences" (Gay, p. 111)

Students of color must see the relevance between what they have learned at home and what they are learning at school and feel that their culture is as important and valued as other cultures. The curriculum must show the importance of the student's culture to keep the student engaged and motivated. Children learn more effectively when they are interested in and validated by what they are learning; therefore, the teacher must allow students to participate in decisions about the curriculum (Gay, 2000).

Culturally relevant pedagogy demands that the teacher work with the student to ensure their needs are being met. Gay (2000) explains that the "curriculum content should be chosen and delivered in ways that are directly meaningful to the students for whom it was intended" (p. 112). At times, the teacher has to use creativity to ensure the curriculum is engaging the students. The teacher can connect the traditional curriculum to the personal experiences of the students or use cultural methods to help the students grasp new concepts (Gay, 2000).

Effective teachers of CRP master the curriculum so that they can infuse it with culture. The curriculum is the instructional content, skills, materials, resources and processes that each state and/or district uses to evaluate student learning (MDESE, 2010a). Teachers must be willing to engage in ongoing professional development and/or

professional learning communities (PLCs) to become effective facilitators of CRP.

Ladson-Billings (1994) states, “Teachers of excellence travel a different route to ensure the growth and development of their children” (p. 15); this is done through professional development, mentors, classroom observations, and coaching.

Mentors, classroom observations, and coaching. Professional development is critical to CRP. Teachers cannot teach what they do not know. Before a teacher enters a CRP classroom, they should have been involved in at least 30 hours of intense professional development, have been provided a mentor teacher, have observed an effective CRP classroom lesson, have taught a mini lesson and have been given feedback by a master teacher (Khepera, 2007). These strategies should occur in the CRP, but often do not because of time constraints, budgets, and personnel (Khepera). CRP schools have found a way to incorporate these strategies through professional learning communities (PLCs).

The PLC model allows education professionals to meet on a regular basis to discuss, collaborate, and support teaching and learning. Novice teachers have an opportunity to collaborate with their more experienced colleagues, in order to share ideas and strategies to improve CRP best practices and student achievement. The PLCs share book studies, attend professional meetings together, observe each other’s classrooms, and develop a sense of purpose. The PLC model holds all staff members accountable for student achievement.

CRP has been an effective model at embracing the culture of most unserved groups in education. Students who have been exposed to CRP seem empowered to learn more and be more, but some theorists believe that is not enough for the African American

learner. They affirm the importance of CRP, but believe the African American child has to be immersed in or be the center of education in order to be successful in school.

African-centered Education: Taking CRP to the Next Level for the African American Learner

There are not many advocates of African-centered education who would dispute the effectiveness of CRP in the lives of students of color, but several believe CRP alone does not go deep enough (Hilliard, 2000; Khepera 2007; Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994; Murrell, 2002) to penetrate the African American learner's history. As Madhubuti and Madhubuti (1994) write, "In America, people of African descent are caught between a hurricane and a volcano when it comes to the acquisition of life-giving and life-sustaining knowledge" (p. 1). This underscores the rationale of centering the African American child in African-centered education. Proponents believe that placing the child at the center of the educational experience allows an inclusionary process that provides equal representation to all groups rather than one group over or below another (Khepera, 2000; Nobles, 2000; Hilliard, 2000). African-centered education is a process to teach children how to change the oppressive social conditions in the United States (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994; Shujaa, 1994). It is intentional and provides African American children opportunities to recover, recreate, and achieve academically and socially. The essential beliefs of African-centered Education include the following:

- a. Self-identity: students must have a clear understanding of who they are.
- b. History: the students must know where they came from.
- c. Relationships: teachers must establish enduring relationships with all stakeholders.
- d. Culturally rich curricula: students learn more when they are exemplified in the curriculum.
- e. Respect: respect is earned through actions, deeds and collaboration.

- f. There is one race, the human race, and it has an African origin (Khepera, 2007, p. 3).

These tenets empower students to examine who they are and explain their relevance in society. Madhubuti and Madhubuti (1994) state:

There are over 100 million people of African descent in the Western hemisphere, and we all face similar problems. Whether one is in Canada, the United States, or Brasil, the fight for self-definiton and self-alliance is like using a shovel to dig a hole in steel enforced concrete. (p. 3)

Self-Identity and Culture

According to the Association of Black Psychologists (ABpsi) (Codrington & Fairchild, 2012), African American learners suffer from identity crisis, self-alienation, and negative self-images, which impacts their ability to learn in a traditional classroom setting. Therefore, ACE is required to go deeper than CRP in the history of the African American student to create a sense of belonging. Many people of color, more specifically people of African ancestry, struggle with self-identity in relation to culture, perhaps due to Eurocentric hegemony and racist attitudes that are present throughout the world and realm of education (Murrell, 2002). According to Browne (2006), “‘Culture’ refers to the language, beliefs, values and norms, customs, dress, diet, roles, knowledge and skills, and all the other things that people learn that make up the ‘way of life’ of any society” (p. 31). Humans develop a strong sense of identity by submerging themselves in their cultural experiences, thus creating self-worth. Hilliard (1997) concurs with Browne, but adds that “enslavement, colonization, murder, the stealing of land and property, and systematic social, political and economic domination of Africans and African American” has contributed greatly to issues of identity (p. 39).

Madhubuti and Madhubuti (1994) suggest that having a clear understanding of one's identity and culture is an important component of social and academic success for many African American children. According to Browne (2006) one of the reasons that many ethnic groups, including African American students, have a strong sense of self is due to their connection to their culture. Brown states:

Identity is about how individuals or groups see and define themselves, and how other individuals or groups see and define them. Identity is formed through the socialization process and the influence of social institutions like the family, the education system and the mass media. (p. 5)

The previous statement is relevant to the culture because the student's own cultural identity is in question. Madhubuti and Madhubuti (1994) assert:

The European American centeredness or Western focus of today's education continues to place conscious blacks on a collision course with the basic premise: that European culture stands at the center and is pivotal to one's understanding of the world. (p. 13)

When people of African lineage have no other model except the cultures model, their self-worth is weakened. CRP through African-centered methods attempts to provide a strong understanding through history, experiences, and cultural practices that will empower the African American student. Illustrating a student's cultural excellence, prior to the period of enslavement of Africans in North and South America, provides a more accurate picture to support a strong sense of purpose and self. In cultural terms, effective African-centered reform models are of critical importance for many African American students' academic and social survival (Khepera, 2007).

CRP through African-centered methods is crucial to students' character development, cultural development, and academic achievement. According to Murrell (2002), "An African-centered pedagogy is necessary to appropriately address the social,

cultural, and historical context of the school experience of African American children and the disconnection between African American cultural heritage and contemporary educational practice” (p. xxix). African American students who have a healthy self-awareness and self-identity perform better academically in schools (Hilliard, 2000; Khepera, 2007; Murrell, 2002; Nobles, 1998). Many students of color have to understand their history before they can celebrate the history of others. When African American students progress in their social and academic development, they develop a greater appreciation for other cultures (Nobles, 2000).

African-centered education is one of the last great hopes for African American children. According to Nobles (2000), ACE’s curriculum and methods provide students historical references necessary for them to construct their cultural and personal identities. This reform model has proven to be one that can effect academic and social change among students of color. Also, this model can reduce the racially biased achievement gap that exists between Whites and nonwhites.

The Racially Biased Achievement Gap

Much disparity exists between the performance on standardized tests of Whites and non-Whites. Murrell (2002) states that the aggregated average test score performance of African Americans is, “the persistent and predictable difference compared to European American on standardized achievement” (pp. 7-8). Taylor and Payne (1983) believed that this is due to a construct that is racially biased. They argued that if the language of the test designer is different from that of the test taker, test bias could evolve (Taylor & Payne, 1983). Hilliard (1991) speculated that standardized tests are not sensitive to the culture of all the students who are taking the test; therefore, student test takers who share

the test manufacturers' cultural backgrounds have an unfair advantage. Additional researchers take it even further; they believe that the achievement gap itself is a means to continue White supremacy in U.S. education (Hilliard).

According to Kirkland (2010), the purpose of the achievement gap in its inception was to identify a major problem in education, but it developed into "a mechanism for normalizing Whiteness and further obscuring past and current histories of racial oppression" (p. 2). Taylor and Payne (1983) emphasize, "The most powerful procedure that can be employed to modify standardized tests is to conduct what one might call a socio-linguistically based item analysis" (p. 12). This is a long process because each test question is scrutinized to ensure that it is free of bias (Taylor & Payne). Hilliard (1991) states standardized tests do not differentiate between verbal communications styles of students; therefore, it is not a valid testing tool for comparing students' abilities. Hilliard states that "a tester's interpretation of a test taker's abilities is derived from comparisons of his/her behavioral responses to a test task in relation to the behavioral responses on the same by a norming sample" (p. 46).

Steele and Aronson (1995) had a parallel point of view concerning the performance gap. They believed that it is not a gap in academic performance but a "stereotype threat." The two researchers asserted that the threat was due to the stereotyping of the African American learner as being inferior to the White learner (Steele & Aronson). This influences African American students' levels of self-efficacy, which can lead to performance on standardized assessments that is below the students' actual abilities.

Hilliard (1991) asks the following question: Is it the test itself or the inability of the student that has caused an academic gap among black and White students? Johnson (1988) theorizes that it may be the test and not the student, stating “It seems logical that a test operates as a mental yardstick, so test scores should accurately reflect the appropriate level of knowledge of the person being tested” (p. 76). The following example may well support her claim: Students who are not exposed to higher level math courses may receive lower test scores, but students who are exposed to such courses and coaching could score higher on tests (Johnson).

According to Murrell (2002), these testing differences will continue to exist because standardized testing is a business that supports the continuation of the status quo in U.S. schools. He argues that “any system that participates in sorting and selecting children and their opportunities based upon some ostensibly ‘objective measure’ of ability is, without question, a system that perpetuates inequality” (p. 8). He suggests that these conditions exist because we live in a racist society that supports institutional racism (Murrell, 2002). He defines institutional racism in education as a system that has not provided adequate educational opportunities for African American students due to their race (Murrell).

The perspective of the aforementioned researchers supports the research study conducted by the Department of Defense (DOD) in the 1980s. The research examined the abilities of students who were interested in enrolling in the military. Participants were given the exact same test during the same period. The report detailed the demographics of age, region, and race. The report also considered the students’ parents’ educational levels and the students’ economic standing. The study did not take into consideration: (a) prior

or current experiences, (b) enrollment in academic courses after high school, or (c) enrollment in job programs at the time of testing.

It was not surprising that African American students had the least favorable scores because they had the lowest economic status. Johnson (1988) asserted that it was due to test bias and grouping:

because the early construction and validation of these tests was based on socioeconomic distinctions, and many early test makers were part of the eugenics movement with political views that believed White groups to be intellectually superior, there was reason to question the fairness of the tests that were given. (p. 85)

Based on the DOD study, an African American educational anthropologist from the University of Chicago conducted additional research that addressed the connection between socioeconomic status of the tester and the test score. The study focused on White students from backgrounds that varied in economic status and found a strong link between socioeconomic status and standardized test scores (Johnson, 1988). The White students who lived below the poverty level often performed lower on achievement tests than did their more affluent peers.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is one of the strategies that helps to provide a more accurate picture of the gaps in achievement and to encourage students to perform better academically on standardized assessments, regardless of their socioeconomic standing (Gay, 2000; Hale-Benson, 1982; Hilliard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2001). CRP can be used to transform education on the local and national levels to close the achievement gap for all students of color, even students living below the poverty level. Gay emphasizes that “close interactions among ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement (that is, between culture and cognition) are becoming increasingly apparent” (p. 25).

Curriculum and Methods

The curriculum in African-centered education focuses on the culture of the African child. The child learns about their history and greatness while still learning about the Eurocentric world around them. The curriculum infuses African and African American history and culture into the traditional state-mandated core curriculum, demonstrating to the child that their history is as important as European history. According to Khepera (2007), combining the two curricula can sometimes be challenging. Teachers must engage in ongoing professional development, collaborate with peers, and be motivated from within to improve their skills.

According to Shujaa (1994), the curriculum is not the most important factor in African-centered education; rather, it is the pedagogy, stating that “pedagogy conveys the importance of the teacher to the education process while curriculum is too often reduced to documentation” (p. 265). Nobles (1998) stresses that various mitigating factors influence the African-centered curriculum, including “cultural structures, experiential background, environmental, and cultural orientation” (p. 3). The curriculum and instructional activities in the curriculum must reflect the culture of the child. The established curriculum must be relevant to the children who are using it. The outcomes of the curriculum must meet state requirements while emphasizing the culture of the child. The ACE curriculum incorporates the mentioned components to have an influence on the African American child’s opportunities for success. Nobles (1998) states, “a potential remedy, being established within social practice [curriculum] is culturally relevant instructional pedagogy in African-centered education” (p. 133).

Connecting the cultural understandings of the African American child to learning will encourage academic accomplishment (Murrell, 2002). Meeting the needs of the children should play a substantial role in what the educator is teaching. Murrell states, “The aim is to link the heritage of cultural practices and learning practices in the African American experience with the immediate experiences of African American students in ways that promote their development and achievement” (p. xxxi). The African-centered curriculum should meet the needs of all children while placing a special focus on the African American child.

Culture and Climate

The culture in the school as well as the culture of the student body is universally important in education, but for the African American learner, culture is critical. The culture connects what is familiar and comfortable to the child’s learning. The goal in ACE is to create a culture that meets the needs of the learner. Ladson-Billings (1994) avows, “By helping to cement their individual and collective cultural identities, the school believes that students will become better academically” (p. 191).

Moody and Moody (1989) conducted a study to determine how culture affects the educational success of African American students, finding that, “African Americans developed a parallel culture in response to their isolation through discrimination, slavery, and ghettoization” (Moody & Moody, p. 183). They assimilated to the European culture as a way to survive (Smith, 1989). Furthermore, the theory suggests that the methods needed to educate the African American child must be culturally explicit (Moody & Moody) in order for the student to have opportunities for success. The research theory also elucidates that relevant, meaningful, and culturally explicit conditions and

instructional strategies need to be present to support meaningful student achievement for the African American child (Moody & Moody).

Student-Based Education Study

Additional research with alternative cultural and ethnic foci supports the findings of African-centered pedagogical studies. For example, the Student-Based Education Study (SBES) was focused on native Alaskan students who were being immersed in the standard Eurocentric pedagogy-based education to increase student achievement. This was relevant to my inquiry because students who attended the district in my study were similarly immersed in several non-relevant thematic schools to increase student achievement, including foreign languages, Greek and Latin, and performing arts. The results of the SBES study were comparable to those of the inquiry district.

The SBES that were immersed in the Eurocentric curriculum levels of academic achievement were lower than other groups of students who received a similar education. The SBES study included only 78 students, all of whom were members of indigenous Alaskan groups. The non-Alaskan village schools, in contrast, were comprised of 15% Asian American students, 61% White students, and 24% Alaskan Native students (Jester, 2002). Their level of academic success was greater than that of the indigenous Alaskan group.

The context of the study was to provide a historical analysis of Native Alaskan education. Jester (2002) states:

The purpose of the study was twofold (a) to review the form and function of American Indian education as imposed by the U.S. educational system, and (b) to describe how the educational approach was transferred to the Alaskan Native in the early 20th century. (Jester, p. 2)

According to Jester (2002), the American Indian had to accept the U.S. educational system or face the extinction of their culture. During the colonization of the Americas, Europeans believed that they were the more civilized race and that the American Indian had to assume their behaviors to achieve social and academic success. Robbed of their land, resources, and political autonomy, American Indians were forced to attend the U.S. schools in order to become civilized. The U.S. educational system diminished the customs and traditions of the Indians by ignoring their cultural identity. During the slavery era, the African American population underwent a similar form of systematic oppression in being forced to speak a different language, practice different customs, and learn in a foreign environment (Hilliard, 2000).

African Immersion Schools

To remedy the injustices the Native Americans and indigenous Alaskan had undergone from the assimilation education model, new educational models surfaced to support African American learners. Pollard and Ajirotutu (2000) assert that African immersion schools in Milwaukee were established because African American students were being assimilated into education the same way as other non-dominant ethnic groups. This was a time of educational catastrophe, and there was great need for educational reform.

African immersion schools were created to counter the Eurocentric hegemonic practices that other ethnic groups had been exposed to. These immersion schools were developed to ensure that African American students received a quality education that immersed them in African American history. The schools were the first models of an African-centered education (Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000). African Immersion schools,

which are similar to the African-centered model of this inquiry, infused African American history and culture into the curriculum.

These schools incorporated an African curriculum, but did not practice African-centered rituals such as Harambee or the Principles of the Nguzo Saba. African immersion schools provided teachers a system whereby they could encourage and promote the culture of the African American learner. Pollard and Ajirotutu (2000) state, “educational environments with energies that nourish human consciousness” (p. 277) are critical for the African American child’s development.

The schools that Pollard and Ajirotutu (2000) referenced were located in Milwaukee. Currently, there are still two African Immersion schools operating in that area: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School and African Immersion High School. Both are a part of the Milwaukee Public Schools, utilize the state curriculum, and infuse the culture and history of African people throughout all content areas. They inspire critical thinking skills and encourage high levels of achievement. As mentioned earlier, the two schools have a similar curriculum as Harambee Elementary but have not achieved the same level of academic success, according to the research (Milwaukee Public Schools, 2000). Some researchers believe that the schools have similar curriculums, and that rituals and routine are sociocultural factors that contribute to student achievement of African American students.

Summary

This chapter surveyed Eurocentric education models that dominate public schools in the U.S. I provided several effective leadership styles that are required to create a school environment that supports academic and social excellence for diverse learners. I

also discussed culturally relevant pedagogy and demonstrated how it is critical for providing historically underserved students of color the quality of education they deserve. Lastly, I discussed African-centered education methods and the role of the African American child's self-identity, which has been traditionally marginalized in public education institutions. Chapter 3 presents a detailed description of the research methodology, including a description of the inquiry design, the rationale for qualitative research, the major approach of a heuristic phenomenological case study and traditions, setting and participants, sampling techniques, data sources and analysis, limitations, and potential ethical problems.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological case study was to understand teachers' perceptions of culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods and strategies and/or best practices for implementing such reforms in order to bolster academic success and student conduct. For the purpose of this study, CRP through African-centered education was defined as centering the African American child in the curriculum as a subject rather than an object, which allows for an inclusionary process, which gives equal representation to all cultural groups rather than one over the other (Khepera, 2007).

The unit of analysis for this study was the culturally relevant pedagogical experiences through African-centered methods of elementary teachers at Harambee Elementary School, in which the majority of students were African American. The unit of analysis allowed the researcher to communicate the boundaries of the study. The focus for data collection was the experiences of teachers and staff with the phenomena of inquiry. There is a discrepancy between the Midwestern district's student population and the teaching methods employed by the district. African American learners comprise the vast majority of students, but the curriculum and teaching methods were dominated by hegemonic or White American cultures and values. Hegemonic or White American curriculum was defined as the explicit teaching of a skill set influenced by the dominant culture's beliefs and values through lectures, demonstrations, seatwork, and observations

(Beck, 1956). Eurocentric curricula focus on the beliefs and ideals of the dominant culture (Murrell, 2002).

Many parents of Harambee elementary encouraged and supported an African-infused curriculum. According to a parent survey conducted in 2006, 94% of the parents surveyed believed that there was a great need for an African-centered curriculum; 4% stated there was some need; 92% believed that it was important for students to learn about that history and culture; 7.8% reflected there was some need; 88% of parents thought the school should expand to a K-12 articulation; 10% were unsure; and 2% responded it should remain K-5. These results reflect the parental support for an African-centered curriculum.

Case study is the preferred method “when the phenomenon under study is not readily distinguishable from context. Case study allows the researcher to gain first account knowledge of the phenomenon” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Interviewing teachers provided firsthand knowledge of experiences related to the phenomenon. My personal experiences with culturally relevant pedagogy at an African-centered school allowed me to bring meaning to the inquiry. Another tradition I used is heuristics, a form of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1990). Merriam (1998) states that a case is heuristic if it can “explain the reasons for a problem, the background, what happened and why” (p. 31).

Heuristics focuses on “intense human experiences, intense from the point of view of the investigator and co-researchers” (Patton, 2002, p. 107). I have personal experience with the culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered education methods. According to Patton (2002), “the self of the researcher is present throughout the process, and while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also

experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge” (p. 107). My personal desire to understand how CRP through African-centered methods improved students’ academic and social behavior informed the development of my research questions.

Research Questions

In qualitative research, the questions and design can change as the research inquiry develops (Maxwell, 2007). One of the subquestions of the research inquiry changed during the study, whose purpose was to gain a better understanding of CRP through African-centered methods. The research questions should have a connection to the goal, conceptual framework, and methods of the research (Maxwell). During the course of this study, although the researcher may change the data analysis techniques, or methods to ensure the validity of the research, this did not become necessary. The following overarching question and preliminary sub-questions guided this inquiry:

1. How did teachers and other staff members in one African-centered elementary school use culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and positive social behavior?
 - a) How do teachers and other staff members describe their experiences implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy in an African-centered school environment?
 - b) What are the perceptions of teachers and other staff members regarding how culturally relevant best practices influenced academic and social success?
 - c) What factors do teachers and other staff members attribute to the success of their students on standardized achievement tests?

- d) What factors do teachers and other staff members attribute to the students' positive social conduct?

In this chapter, I examine the rationale for qualitative research, including but not limited to an overview of qualitative methodology. I discuss the role of the researcher, explain the inclusion of theory, and discuss the influence of theoretical traditions. I also discuss the design of the study including setting, data sources, and data analysis. I conclude this chapter by discussing the limitations and ethical considerations.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research focuses on “assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the research problems inquiring into the meaning individual or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). This type of inquiry mediates how to explore the teachers' and staff members' experiences and perspectives with African-centered education.

Qualitative inquiry allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Merriam (1998) affirms that qualitative research is “an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with little disruption of the natural setting” (p. 5). My inquiry was conducted in a natural setting in which participants felt comfortable such as a home, library, or other convenient location. During the study, I was sensitive to the needs of the participant. I used several forms of inquiry to gain a deeper understanding of CRP through African-centered methods. Creswell (2007) states that qualitative research is “an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a

complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (p. 2).

Qualitative data allowed the researcher to provide rich, thick description for the inquiry. Descriptive data related a sequential picture of events that supported the inquiry. Miles and Huberman (1994) state, “with qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences and derive fruitful explanations” (p. 1). The qualitative research design necessitates that the researcher have a “goal, conceptual framework, research questions, methods and validity” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 4). Qualitative research is also interactive by design. Maxwell states qualitative research is “interconnected and flexible” (p. 3). This flexibility allowed the design of the research inquiry to evolve and develop over time.

Qualitative research facilitates the flow of events that happened at the research site in chronological order. I was able to develop a timeline of events and activities based on the information I gained from the participants. This type of research allowed me to make meaning from the information the participants provided and to understand its importance to my research inquiry.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a heuristic phenomenological case study is to be “open to new concepts and willing to make changes to personal perception, if needed, adhere to strict guidelines relevant to collecting data and exclude data that is not supported by the inquiry, even if the researcher thinks it’s important” (Patton, 2002, pp. 109-110). Merriam (2009) declares, “The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 5). The researcher as instrument makes design decisions

throughout the inquiry, determining what data to collect and making interpretations (Creswell, 2007). I determined, collected, and examined data to develop meaning that led to a clearer understanding of the phenomenon through the lived experiences of the participants.

The use of a case study informed by heuristic inquiry required that I have a keen understanding of related design elements and analysis procedures. Patton proclaims, “Heuristics is a form of phenomenological inquiry that brings to the forefront the personal experience and insight of the researcher” (p. 107). As the researcher, I was able to describe how participants viewed the phenomenon and “bracket out, as much as possible,” their individual experiences and insight to develop trends and patterns (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). This was challenging, since one of the key components of this type of inquiry connects the shared experiences of the researcher and the participants. I was open to new concepts and willing to make changes to personal perceptions, if needed. I also adhered to strict guidelines relevant to collecting data and excluded data that was not consistent with the inquiry goals (Patton, 2002). I collected data through documents, surveys, and interviews. I made connections between the data sets and my interest of CRP through ACE.

Creswell (2007) addresses the researcher’s key role of collecting data from the individuals involved with the study. He states, “Often data collection in phenomenological studies consists of in-depth interviews and multiple interviews with participants” (p. 61). As the researcher, I was open to discarding non-essential information.

My role as the researcher included securing and protecting the identity and shared information and experiences of the participants. The participants trusted that I would keep the shared information and experiences secure. As the researcher, I forged relationships with the participants throughout the research process. I worked diligently to keep the integrity of my research intact.

Throughout this process, I established trust with the participants, and trust developed into “research relationships” that were essential to the research design (Maxwell, 2007, p. 82). I expanded the relationships with the participants through open communication. By the end of the study, I was able to share relevant information and experiences from these data.

Design of the Study

Setting, Participants, and Sampling Techniques

The setting for this inquiry was a K-5 African-centered elementary school in the urban core of a Midwestern city between the years 2000 and 2006. The schools closed in 2006 to reorganize into a K-9 articulation. The student enrollment was between 350 and 382 during this time. The school had two rounds of students in each grade level K-5, 14 homeroom teachers, five specialty teachers, one counselor, one parent liaison, five caring community staff members, a part-time vice principal, and a principal. The student demographics were 99% African American and 1% White, and more than 88% received free or reduced lunch (MDESE, 2006). The teaching staff was diverse; 60% of the teachers identified themselves as African American, 35% identified themselves as White, and 5% identified themselves as other.

I reviewed school documents such as parent newsletters, school handbook, staff memos, and the school's accountability plan. Based on the information I gathered from the document analysis, I developed a criterion that each participant had to meet, and I developed my survey questions. I utilized two forms of purposeful sampling: criterion and snowball or chain sampling. First, I used snowball or chain sampling to identify potential participants through a "who knows who" approach. Utilizing the snowball sampling approach, I sent an email to six former staff members with whom I remained in contact, requesting the email addresses of former staff members of Harambee Elementary (see Appendix A). Patton (2002) states snowball or chain sampling "is an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases" (p. 237).

I received the email addresses of 25 former staff members from my informants. I immediately emailed a survey of ten predetermined questions to the 25 former staff members requesting that they return the survey via email within a week (see Appendix B). The survey questionnaires were fixed-response questions to determine if participants met the following criteria: (a) number of years employed at the school equal to or greater than two years, (b) experience with teaching CRP through ACE, and (c) the time period worked at the school between 2000 and 2006. Patton (2002) states, a "fixed-response questionnaire provides a limited and predetermined list of possibilities" (p. 353).

I received only five surveys after my initial request; therefore I sent out a second email to the 20 potential participants who did not respond. Following the second request, I received an additional ten survey questionnaires. I send out a third email request but did not receive any additional responses. After reviewing all surveys submitted, I determined that seven participants met the aforementioned criteria. Patton (2002) states, "the logic of

criterion sampling is to review and study all cases that meet a predetermined criterion of importance, a strategy common in quality assurance efforts” (p. 238). In this case, criterion sampling was intended to bring about the involvement of the most suitable candidates. I emailed an invitation to participate in the inquiry (see Appendix C) to all seven participants who met the predetermined criterion. Out of the seven participants, five consented to participate in the inquiry. The two who did not consent to participate had preexisting engagements that would have conflicted with the interviews. My inquiry goal was to interview a minimum of five participants to garner a variety of perspectives of CRP through ACE. According to Creswell (2007), “all cases must meet some criterion; useful for quality assurance” (p. 127). It was my desire to work thoroughly with each participant to gain the most insight into the phenomenon.

Each participant served as a single case in this heuristic phenomenological case study. Creswell (2007) states that case study “involves the widest array of data collection as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case” (p. 123). The unit of analysis was the participants’ experiences with the African-centered education program; therefore it was holistic in nature (Yin, 2009). The unit on analysis was selected because, as the researcher, I wanted to find out how the different participants’ experiences with CRP through ACE informed levels of academic and social success at Harambee elementary school.

Data Sources

Patton (2002) explains that qualitative research develops from three main kinds of qualitative data sources: “in-depth open ended interviews, direct observations and written documents” (p. 4). I drew from a variety data sources for this inquiry: (a) documents

(b) written survey questionnaire, and (c) individual interviews with participants. Maxwell (2007) states that by “using more than one method, you will have a broader scope and your results will be more credible” (p. 93). Data analysis was informed by crystallization. According to Ellingson (2000), there is no formula for crystallization design; in its place “opportunities and constraints abound, and researchers should expect, even embrace, an organic evolution of their projects” (p. 73).

Crystallization is an emerging data analysis technique that allowed me to view CRP and ACE through multiple lenses including poetry, nonverbal queuing, art, and artifacts. Ellingson (2009) states, “Crystallization necessitates seeing the field of methodology not as an art/science dichotomy but as existing along a continuum from positivism through radical interpretivism (i.e., scholarship as art) (p. 5). This process allows the researcher to connect art to research. Crystallization allows the researcher to express data in creative ways throughout the document, surveys, and interview analysis.

Documents. First, I used documents as a data source. Documents can be either private or public (Creswell, 2007). Documents are relevant to qualitative research because they communicate information. According to Patton (2002), documents include “excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program records; memoranda and correspondences; official publications and reports, personal diaries; and open ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys” (p. 4). The documents I utilized were parent newsletters, the schools accountability plans, memos, and staff handbooks. These data sources informed the development of my survey questionnaires. Yin (2009) affirms that using documents adds validity to research.

I used public and private documents that included the aforementioned data. Patton (2002) avows, “records, documents, artifacts and archives—what has traditionally been called “material culture” in anthropology—constitute a particularly rich source of information about many organizations and programs” (p. 47). I believe the documents I selected guided my survey questions and supported my quest to answer my research questions. Pattern (2002) emphasizes, “Learning to use, study, and understand document files is part of the repertoire of skills needed for qualitative inquiry” (p. 295). I managed my document collection by scanning the documents into my password-protected computer and placing them in folders. Back-up copies of these data were stored on a flash drive, which was kept in a locked drawer throughout the inquiry. Following the document review, I developed the survey questionnaire.

Survey questionnaire. The next data source utilized was a survey questionnaire. According to Owens (2002), a survey is a research method for “collecting information from a selected group of people using standardized questionnaires or interviews” (p. 2). The questionnaire itself does not encompass the totality of the survey. “Surveys also require selecting populations for inclusion, pre-testing instruments, determining delivery methods, ensuring validity, and analyzing results” (Owens, p. 1)

Survey questionnaires are an effective way to gather relevant information that may not be located anywhere else. According to Owens (2002), there are four main reasons to collect data using a survey questionnaire:

- (a) uniqueness: gather information not available from other sources;
- (b) probability sampling: unbiased representation of population of interest,
- (c) standardization of measurement: same information collected from every respondent; and
- (d) analysis needs: use survey data to complement existing data from secondary sources. (p. 2)

To ensure that the survey questionnaire results are valid, the researcher must eliminate potential errors by developing clear questions, making sure participants understand what was being asked, and providing a phone number and/or email address that can be used in case clarifications are necessary. Scheuren (2004) stresses, “an integral part of a well-designed survey is to “plan in” quality all along the way (p. 18). As the researcher, I had a clear understanding of the purpose of my survey.

The main purpose of this survey was to narrow my search to select the best participants. The secondary purpose was to collect data that would help me answer my research questions. Innovation Insights (“Using Surveys,” 2006) affirms, “The purpose of the survey drives the collection method, the participants to be included in the survey process, the types of questions asked, and many other factors” (p. 2). A variety of survey formats can be utilized, such as paper, phone, online, and face-to-face. I decided to use an online survey because I believed I could reach more potential participants via the internet, the cost is free, and I could get results back quickly. As the researcher, I created the online survey questionnaire, sent the survey out, and analyzed these data results.

The survey began with an Institutional Review Board’s approved consent form (see Appendices D and E), followed by ten well-formulated open and closed questions that addressed participants’ experiences of CRP through African-centered methods (see Appendix F). I used my connections with former staff members to acquire the email addresses of potential participants. I emailed all potential participants of Harambee Elementary for whom I had an email address. I requested all potential participants to complete and return the survey via email in one week. The results of the survey allowed me to select five teachers for the inquiry.

Interviews. Open-ended questions were best for the two 30- to 60-minute semi-structured interviews I conducted. This process allowed participants to define their experiences in their own way (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) describes four types of effective questions: (a) hypothetical – poses what if questions; (b) devil’s advocate – challenges respondent to consider an opposing view; (c) ideal position – asks person to describe an ideal situation; (d) interpretive – offers an interpretation of what is being said and asks for a reaction. I used each type of question throughout the interview process. My goal was that the interview questions would open the gates to deeper dialogue. Creswell (2007) emphasizes, “The researcher must ask open ended questions and not pretend to be the expert on any given topic” (p. 43).

In this inquiry, I used a combination approach to the interviews, adapting an informal conversation approach with semi-structured questions and a conversational interview strategy (Patton, 2002). Patton acknowledges that contrasting approaches are permitted to explore information in greater depth. The purpose of the interview was to gather data to inform my research inquiry. I selected these forms of questioning so that I could be flexible and explore the participants’ responses in greater depth (Patton).

Each participant was asked to participate in two interview sessions. During the interviews, I used a semi-structured interview protocol to offer structure to the process (see Appendix F). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) assert, “You do not want the respondent responses to wander all over the field, but to center on a particular area” (p. 131). The interview protocol was a plan that guided the interview but flowed when follow-up questions were required.

I managed the interview process by recording the interviews using a tape recorder. These audio recordings were transcribed for data analysis use. I used a notebook and iPad to scribe notes and personal impressions during the interviews. This helped me determine what was relevant when I began coding the interviews. Finally, I used my interview notes to inform my research inquiry.

Data Analysis Procedures

The methods I used to analyze data were the six basic phases in the heuristic process of phenomenological analysis according to Moustakas (1990): initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. I also utilized crystallization, “a creative analytic practice that embodies both rigorous data analysis and creative forms of representations” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934).

Crystallization came into practice during the immersion stage because it “incorporates the use of other disciplines, such as art, sociology, history, dance, architecture, and anthropology, to inform our research processes and broaden our understanding of method and substance” (Janesick, 2000, p. 392).

Crystallization provided a more in-depth look at the surveys, interviews, documents, and artifacts. Janesick (2000) affirms, “Crystallization recognizes the many facets of any given approach to the social world as fact of life” (p. 390). Ellingson (2009) proclaims that the image of a triangle is not enough in qualitative research. The image of a crystal provides a lens that can capture images from multiple angles.

The first phase of the data analysis is initial engagement. I have been interested in African-centered education since I was a senior in college. I wanted to understand how African American children learned. After attending a conference on CRP, I was ready to

learn more. Moustakas (1990) states, “The task of initial engagement is to discover an intense interest” (p. 27). My personal and professional passion for this type of educational reform has inspired my desire to explore the subject in greater academic depth, contributing to the literature through this research study.

The second aspect is immersion. I worked diligently to establish connections with my participants in this phase. This was the phase in which I utilized crystallization by asking participants to bring and react to poetry, photos, and mental images. This allowed me to see what influenced the participants’ responses. According to Janesick (2000), “crystallization incorporates...art, sociology, history, dance, architecture, to inform our research processes” (p. 392). Crystallization methodology fits within the context of an emerging design. Creswell (2007) sustains, “Research cannot be tightly prescribed and all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data” (p. 39).

The next phase of this process was incubation. I collected these data and let it incubate to make connections with the participants’ information. I sorted the information to develop meaning. I slowed down at this point in the research in order to let the data process, develop, expand, and clarify to extend meaning. I did not look at these data for five days. This phase took time to make meaningful connections to the research inquiry (Moustakas, 1990).

The fourth phase of this process was illumination. Trends and patterns emerged in this phase. I used coding to develop the trends and patterns as they developed. I used descriptive and interpretive codes. The descriptive codes allowed the data to speak for itself with “little interpretation” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 57). I used interpretive

codes to place the themes into categories. Utilizing these two types of codes allowed me to group the information from the selected data.

The fifth phase of data analysis was explication. During this phase, I was able to make deeper connections with the information obtained from the participants. The primary theme materialized at this point in the research. Moustakas (1990) states, “The purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning” (p. 31).

Lastly, I used creative synthesis to connect all these data by bringing it all together. This allowed me to explain the relationships more methodically. Moustakas (1990) states, “the researcher in entering this process is thoroughly familiar with all these data in its major constituents, qualities and themes” (p. 31). This entire data analysis process allowed me to connect my experiences to the participants to explain my research inquiry.

In summation, I used the six phases of data analysis, included crystallization, and began gathering my data in the fall of 2013 with the goal of having the research study completed by the spring of 2014. I provided online surveys to all potential participants and started collecting school documents as soon as the SSIRB approved the research inquiry. I selected participants after reviewing the surveys, and then I conducted semi-structured interviews with each participant separately. I examined data throughout the fall of 2013 and completed my dissertation draft to share with my committee members in March 2014.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Several limitations and ethical considerations were made before conducting this heuristic phenomenological case study. The experiences I brought from working with culturally responsive pedagogy through African-centered Education constituted a source of bias. Maxwell (2007) states, “traditionally what you bring to the research from your own background and identity has been treated as a” bias,” something whose influence needs to be eliminated from the design, rather than a valuable component of it” (p. 37).

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the principal investigator, and what they bring to the table from their personal lives can affect the inquiry. Thus, the researcher’s personal views and opinions can contribute to bias in qualitative inquiry. Since I collected these data, my perceptions of the phenomenon will influence these data I choose.

My highly favorable perception of African-centered education (which I consider to be a way of life rather than merely a reform model) and belief that traditional public education is a hegemonic institution may also give rise to bias. To remove my personal bias, I relied on these data and reported only what these data revealed. I used these data to answer my research questions and utilized crystallization to analyze the collected data and to minimize impediments to its validity.

A potential limitation was that I taught at the inquiry school during the period of my research inquiry. I had professional and personal relationships with some of the participants. I had also experienced success using culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered Education. An additional limitation was that the school of my inquiry had been closed for seven years; therefore the participants had to rely on the memories of their experiences at the inquiry school. The fact that I am the daughter-in-law of the

former principal and the wife of the former director of the school of my inquiry was also a limitation.

To ensure that participants felt comfortable sharing information with me, I assured them that I had followed the guidelines of the SSRIB. I also provided a copy of the SSRIB policy that explained the confidentiality I must uphold as the principal investigator. I allowed each participant to review the policy and ask questions before signing. Following these measures was intended to safeguard the reliability and validity of my inquiry.

Validity. According to Creswell (2007), validation in qualitative research assesses the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants (pp. 206-207). Qualitative researchers use diverse lenses to look at research. Creswell stated that:

Validation as a distinct strength of qualitative research in that the account made through extensive time spent in the field, the detailed thick description, and the closeness of the researcher to the participants in the study all add to the value or accuracy of the study. (p. 207)

Creswell (2007) shares several validation strategies that may help the researcher eliminate biases. I incorporated several into my study. First, I used crystallization to support data sources with other sources. Crystallization was also used to gain a clearer perspective of CRP through African-centered methods. I completed this through the surveys, interviews, poetry, artifacts, pictures, and school documents. I collaborated with peers to gain a broader perspective and to examine these data from a different vantage point. I also communicated with participants to gain their perspectives. Lastly, I worked diligently to ensure the transferability of this inquiry (p. 207).

Maxwell (2007) states that validity can be defined “in a fairly straightforward, commonsense way to refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 106). In my research, I used validity to make meaning and draw conclusions about the teachers’ experiences with CRP through African-centered methods. I understood that validity threats are always possible and can be influenced by the researchers’ biases and reactivity. Maxwell (2007) emphasizes, “A crucial issue in addressing validity is demonstrating that you will allow for the examination of competing explanations and discrepant data—that your research is not simply a self-fulfilling prophecy” (p. 126).

Reliability. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), reliability of a study is determined by the length of the study and must be consistent with the methods utilized. “The reliability of a measure is the extent to which the measure produces the same results when used repeatedly to measure the same thing” (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004, p. 218). The instruments or techniques that I used were intended to support my findings. I ensured that all participant interviews were conducted in the same manner according to the protocol to the best of my ability. I safeguarded the interview site and took into account the mood of the participants to gain reliable data (Rossi et al., 2004). My inquiry remained reliable because I ensured that I did not vary the participant interviews or change any of the conditions.

To overcome issues of unreliability, I interviewed the participants two times and repeated similar questions. Rossi, Lipsey and Freeman (2004) state, “the most straightforward way for the evaluator to check the reliability of a candidate outcome is to administer it at least twice under circumstances when the outcome measured should not

change between administration” (p. 219). My survey questionnaire, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document/artifacts analysis supported the reliability of my research inquiry. Ellingson (2009) theorizes that looking at data collections from varying angles will strengthen and ensure reliability. She refers to this as crystallization. Crystallization allowed me to view these data sets from this inquiry from numerous perspectives.

Potential Ethical Problems. The researcher must ensure the process is ethical, beyond merely obtaining permission from the institution review board or committees (Creswell, 2007) to conduct research inquiry. I am the daughter-in-law of the former principal of the inquiry school; therefore, I followed all of the appropriate protocols to ensure that my participants felt they could trust my research. I accomplished this by treating each case separately and ensuring the participant’s anonymity. I followed all guidelines related to human participants’ confidentiality. As the researcher, I was aware of all the potential threats and was prepared to address them as needed.

Discussion of ethical review protocol. Throughout this inquiry, I emphasized and followed the requirements and research expectations as described by the Social Science Institutional Review Board (SSIRB) and the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC). My study participants were all over the age of 18; therefore, I was not required to obtain parental consent, but I was required to gain informed consent from each participant.

I followed all guidelines closely to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. I reviewed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) procedures closely to ensure that I followed all guidelines when dealing with people. I followed SSIRB requirements before my study began to ensure the methods complied with

UMKC's requirements. I used UMKC's policies to make sure my proposal was in agreement with the SSIRB. I also met with my advisor to confirm that I was adhering to all requirements relevant to the protection of human subjects throughout this inquiry.

As the student researcher, I was responsible for meeting ongoing requirements for my research inquiry. I obtained consent from all participants in my inquiry and followed the UMKC requirements when obtaining informed consent from the participants. The informed consent process included a statement that described confidentiality of records.

Participants were able to remove themselves from the inquiry at any point if they were no longer willing to participate. There was no penalty for the participants to withdraw from the study. I was responsible for all documentation, submitting all reports and requests for continuing review and approval from the SSIRB in agreement with the policies, procedures, and actions of the SSIRB. Chapter 4 reveals the major findings and themes from the data analysis of the documents, surveys, and in-depth interviews.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This inquiry emerged out of my belief that Black children who lived in the urban core of a large city could achieve academically and socially in a public school setting despite attending a school in a district that was not achieving academically according to state standardized test. After personally experiencing success, as measured by state test scores, with students in an urban public school, I wondered why so many Black students in other schools located in the same district were not achieving at the same level. I began this inquiry to acquire answers to this question, so I could provide concrete evidence to support teachers of Black students who were not achieving at acceptable levels. As this inquiry developed, the participants began to shed light through their personal experiences and revelations.

The intent of this heuristic phenomenological case study was to provide meaning and understanding of the experiences related to CRP through African-centered methods from the participants' perspective. The overarching goal of this inquiry was to: (a) understand teachers' insights of CRP through African-centered methods, (b) to identify strategies, and (c) to describe best classroom practices that led to school outcomes that included meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) and improved student conduct. The intricacies linked with using three traditions and one viewpoint were overwhelming to this neophyte researcher. To construct meaning and understanding of the experiences related to CRP through African-centered methods, one guiding question and four sub-questions guided this inquiry:

1. How did teachers and other staff members in one African-centered elementary school use culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and positive social behavior?
 - a) How do teachers and other staff members describe their experiences implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy in an African-centered school environment?
 - b) What are the perceptions of teachers and other staff members regarding how culturally relevant best practices influenced academic and social success?
 - c) What factors do teachers and other staff members attribute to the success of their students on standardized achievement tests?
 - d) What factors do teachers and other staff members attribute to the students' positive social conduct?

In-depth interviews were used to answer the guiding questions and four subquestions. The surveys provided answers to the four subquestions. Documents addressed the guiding question and four subquestions; specifically, questions b and d.

The unit of analysis was the experiences related to CRP through African-centered methods of five elementary teachers who worked with students at one Midwestern urban school. Each participant served as a case in this heuristic phenomenological case study. The unit of analysis in conjunction with the surveys and research questions provided the structure for the research findings.

I explored teachers' insights into culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods, and their perspectives regarding strategies and/or best practices that

led to school outcomes that included meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) and improved student conduct. To allow teachers' personal experiences to unfold, the qualitative research method was most appropriate for this inquiry.

Setting and Participants

The five participants for this inquiry were selected using qualitative sampling techniques capable of providing the thickest, richest descriptions of information. The techniques were snowball or chain-sampling and criterion sampling (Patton, 2002). This process allowed the researcher to use the “paradigm of maximum structural variation” (p. 109). Patton (2002) declares that variation of the sample and of research methods avoid one-sidedness (p. 109). The five participants selected were teachers who taught at Harambee elementary for at least two years between 2000 and 2006. The teacher demographics were one White and four Blacks. All participants were female. Their teaching experience at the time of their tenure at Harambee elementary school ranged from two years to 24 years. Two of the participants currently work in the district of my inquiry, one is retired from education, and the remaining two participants are currently teaching in neighboring school districts. Each participant represented a different subject and/or grade level: one participant taught first grade, one participant was an art teacher who taught all grades, two intermediate cases taught grades three and five, and the final case was a speech pathologist who worked with intermediate students. The diversity of participants allowed me to analyze a variety of perspectives and experiences. All participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

This inquiry allowed me to connect with my participants in a way I had not believed was possible. All of the participants were former colleagues, but the interviews

allowed me to get to know each one of them on a much more personal level. I earned their respect and trust, which allowed me to probe more deeply into their personal experiences, feelings, and beliefs. The participants seemed to be honest and open regarding their personal stories. They wanted their stories about CRP through ACE, to be shared with everyone.

Honest, open dialogue was of great importance for this inquiry to be successful. The participants had to recall information that had been stored in their memories for over six years. I had to ensure that they were in a comfortable setting that would allow them to recall experiences, events, and details naturally. I spoke with each participant several times before the first interview took place because I needed them to feel comfortable with me. We discussed what they were currently doing in relation to their profession. I inquired about their families and friends. Three of the participants stated that talking to me prior to the first interview helped them feel more relaxed and comfortable during the initial interview.

The participants' recollection of events and experiences were powerful. They spoke as if the events had just occurred. Their ability to recall specific details was phenomenal. They spoke frankly concerning their experiences and wanted to make sure I got down everything they said. Throughout the inquiry participants wanted to know if there would ever be another school like the Harambee School. I stated I was not sure but I hoped the research would inform educators about the best practices associated with CRP through African-centered methods.

Data Sources

The documents were my first data source. They included school documents and artifacts such as newsletters, agendas from School Advisory Committee, school handbooks, accountability plans, memos, and curricula. These additional data allowed me to develop trends and to support some of the ideas that the participants had shared. The data revealed the answers to my most pressing questions concerning CRP through African-centered methods and also guided my survey questions.

My second data source was surveys. I had personal connections with several former staff members after Harambee Elementary closed in 2006. I emailed each of them requesting the email addresses of any former staff member of Harambee Elementary School with whom they may have kept in contact (see Appendix A). I received the email addresses of 25 potential candidates. I then emailed 25 surveys to potential participants and requested that they respond within in one week (see Appendix B). I received five surveys from my initial email request to potential participants. I sent a second email to the remaining potential participants and I received an additional ten surveys from the second email request. I sent a third email to potential participants but did not receive any additional surveys.

The participants who returned surveys were the school's former principal, the curriculum director, vice principal, eleven teachers, and a paraprofessional. Their years of service ranged from one year to 30 years. I selected my participants from the survey responses I received based on predetermined criteria.

The five selected participants met the following criteria: taught at Harambee between 2000 and 2006, worked at the school at least two years, and had experience

using CRP through African-centered methods. I selected the participants based on the aforementioned criteria and whether they expressed an interest in participating in the research inquiry. The first interview with all five cases was face-to-face and lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The second interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Two of the second interviews were face-to-face, two were over the phone, and one participant emailed responses to the second interview questions. The second interviews were shorter in length because some of the questions were similar to those in the first set of questions, and participants' schedules did not allow for more time (see Appendix G).

These interviews allowed me to probe more deeply into the participants' experiences with CRP through African-centered methods. During these interviews, participants had to react to poetry, recall mental images, and remember historical events related to Harambee Elementary. In some of the interviews, the participants recalled events that I took part in; I worked hard to stay focused because three of the five interviews were extremely emotional for me personally and professionally.

I conducted fieldwork from mid-October 2013 through February 2014. The fieldwork consisted of emailing surveys, conducting interviews, organizing and coding data, and analyzing school documents. This timeframe allowed me to thoroughly collect and gather data to develop a thick, rich description and clarify the themes that emerged during data analysis (Merriam, 2009).

Data Analysis Procedures

The six basic phases in the heuristic process were the primary method of data analysis: (a) initial engagement, (b) immersion/crystallization, (c) incubation, (d) illumination, (e) explication, and (f) creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology/heuristic analysis was also utilized during the data analysis process. This process allowed the researcher to use her own personal experiences. Furthermore, this process ensured the alignment of the theoretical framework to the data themes that emerged.

Within-case Analysis

The five participants who served as cases are described in detail in the within-case analysis. Four themes emerged from the documents, surveys, and in-depth participant interviews: expectations, validations, school culture, and curriculum and pedagogy (see Table 2). The findings in the with-in case analysis are delineated by participant and explained first through a description of each participant, followed by the themes from each data source that are present in each case.

The four themes were not present in all five cases. The themes ranged from three to four themes, depending on the participant. I provided more descriptive information related to the definitions of the theme in the first case, and followed that with brief references in succeeding cases. The first two within-case analyses were longer than the last three cases because I was able to have face-to-face interviews, and all four themes were present. The last three within-case analyses were phone interviews and had three to four themes present. In Chapter 5, I provide an explanation for the lack of in-depth description during the interview process and what I would do to produce more description. Table 2 outlines the themes and interpretive codes, which gives more meaning to the data.

Table 2

Overview of Data Themes

Themes	Interpretive Codes		
	1	2	3
Expectations	Teacher and staff beliefs	Student achievement	Teacher and staff commitment
Validations	Personal beliefs	Self-identity	Cultural awareness
School culture	Pride	Traditions and celebrations	School leadership
Curriculum & pedagogy	Cultural consciousness	Professional development	Curriculum

Case 1: Kuumba

I have known Kuumba, a white teacher, for twelve years. I worked with her for eight years at Harambee Elementary and kept in touch with her off and on after the school reconfigured to a K-9 articulation in 2006. I personally knew her to be an effective teacher who believed in the student’s ability to be successful academically and socially. She was a team player who demanded the best from her students. She also encouraged parental involvement in all class activities by inviting parents to art shows presented by students. She often entered the students’ work in art competitions throughout the city. She travelled to Botswana, Africa, and was excited about sharing her experiences with the students. She proclaimed in her interview that the only reason she continued to work in the Midwestern district was because of Harambee Elementary.

When I sent the initial survey requesting volunteers to participate in my inquiry, she was the first person to respond. She seemed to genuinely be interested in the research inquiry and immediately agreed to participate. For this inquiry, I choose the Kiswahili name Kuumba for her pseudonym. This name means “to do always as much as you can in order to leave your community more beautiful and beneficial than when you inherited it.” This name reflects her creativity and contributions to the school.

I had not seen Kuumba in about one year and she still held very high expectations for her students. I conducted her interview at her home; this was the most convenient location for her because she has two young children. We talked and reminisced for about 15 minutes before the interview began. I knew I could reminisce with her for hours, so I scheduled my next participant interview immediately following her interview, as a means to keep me on task. We both grew serious as I explained the confidentiality form she was required to sign before we could proceed with the interview. She signed the form, and we began.

Theme #1: Expectations A theme that emerged throughout all data collection and in my interview with Kuumba was her expectations. These data revealed expectations at the school were important to the school’s overall success. According to Sleeter and Cornbleth (2011), there is a connection between teacher expectations of students’ ability based on class or race, and the students’ ability to succeed in school. Expectations were defined as a strong belief held by staff, students, and the school community that students would succeed academically and socially using a culturally rich curriculum.

Gay (2009) explained five different trends that are persistent in education: (a) Teacher expectations influence the quality of learning, (b) teacher expectations can be affected by outside factors, (c) teacher assumptions about students can affect expectations, (d) teachers have higher expectations for White students, and (e) expectations and efficacy are related (pp. 57-60). Khepera (2007) asserted the importance of high expectation in the urban school setting to promote academic excellence.

The first few questions I asked were related to why Kuumba decided to work at the school and how the school supported high levels of academic and social achievement. She seemed excited to share her experiences. She said, “I decided to work at the school because of its African curriculum. She proclaimed, “I was in the Peace Corps in Africa and very interested in the school’s theme and curriculum.” Kuumba stated that she finally was able to practice some of things that she had learned. When I asked her a question about why she believed the school was successful, her response correlated with the student handbook goals and objectives, she stated:

I always used my students’ leadership abilities. That was part of the ACE philosophy—“treat the children as people”—give them a voice. I always gave them choices in my classroom. I also held them accountable for their behavior and academics. All students had a portfolio of their work. The students could calculate their own grades. There were never surprises. Parents were always welcomed in my classroom too. I had an open door policy—we were a family. The environment in my classroom was parent and student friendly. I had students’ work displayed all over my walls. The students picked the work that went in their portfolio.

Teacher/staff beliefs. The first interpretive code that related to the theme was teacher beliefs—a belief that all students who entered Harambee elementary would be academically challenged by teachers. Teacher beliefs are defined as the truths that

teachers hold about students, the school, and the community that affect students' ability to achieve (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Several of the documents revealed that the interpretive code of teacher/staff beliefs were important to the over school's success. An excerpt from Harambee Elementary vision statement reads as follows:

To provide students with a sense of purpose, a belief that all students can learn and become productive, successful social members of a larger society. This will occur through study, instruction and the responsibility of teaching students the rich history and contributions of African/African-American people and culture. This will enable students to become aware of the connection of the past to the present, along with the future.

Teacher and staff expected students to achieve at the school; their strong beliefs in the students seemed to be an important component for student achievement at Harambee elementary.

Throughout the interview, Kuumba revealed that she had very high expectations for all of her students. She informed me that her belief in the students and high expectations contributed to their overall success in school. She detailed why she believed the students were academically and socially successful. She made the following statement: "High expectations and consistency; challenging the students to do better than they thought they could. Always giving them something to work on; teaching to their learning style; using math strategies." Her belief in her students is evident through her statement. She emphasized how her expectations and beliefs were relevant to her teaching.

Student achievement. The next interpretive code that also supported expectations was student achievement. All data revealed that the teachers and staff expected the students to be successful academically in school and on state assessments. Student

achievement was defined as the students' ability to meet independent academic goals (Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011) that would lead to success on state assessments and future development. The following response from a survey supported the notion that student achievement and expectations are interwoven.

The school taught test taking strategies and vocabulary. All classrooms and teachers believed that the kids could and would achieve. The teachers also reflected back on the successful ancestors from the students' past. This built the students' self-esteem, making them believe that they could do it too. We also taught test taking strategies and explained how they would help them in life

An excerpt from a school document, the 2000-2001 Midwestern School Accountability Plan, linked the message of expectations and student achievement:

School Expectations

- 1) Students will demonstrate improved performance in all core areas of study
- 2) All students will develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for life-long learning, and productive citizenship
- 3) The school will offer learning experiences that recognize and value diversity as an integral part of a high quality education. (p. 22)

Every teacher in the study believed every student should, would, and could achieve academically and socially using CRP.

According to responses from the surveys and interviews, teachers were expected to have high expectations as a means to improve student success. Several respondents referred to high student achievement as an expectation rather than an exception to the rule. One survey respondent stated, "Everyone was expected to meet AYP every year." A response during an interview put it all in perspective:

My first year at [Harambee] the teachers helped me learn the curriculum, they assisted, encouraged and provided resources. The students were respectful, honest and believed in themselves and the teachers believed in them. I expected a lot from the students—everybody expected the students to be successful.

As noted from the documents, surveys, and interviews, the teachers believed and expected the students to do well. According to their State test scores, they met and exceeded expectations during the years of my inquiry.

Teacher/staff commitment. The final interpretive code that resonated through the expectations theme was teacher/staff commitment. The staff was committed to the students' academic and social well-being. All data connected success to the commitment of the teachers and staff. Teacher/staff commitment was defined as the dedication to the field of education that places the child at the center of all learning by engaging the interests of the child before their interests ((Lawrence, 2014). Based on an analysis of all data, the staff at Harambee made the student the center of learning. One comment from a survey echoed the code loud and clear. The survey revealed how committed the staff was to student achievement:

I believe for me personally, starting in August setting the stage for testing and using testing words and phrases, and using the testing format throughout the school. I also started tutoring in October with or without stipend and continued through to the testing window. I also tutored on Saturdays at my church from January through April (without stipend). However I believe our best years were when every classroom had a paraprofessional on a fulltime basis. This is when true differentiation instruction took place. Also, teaching the monthly objectives that were geared towards state assessments and using the data to know which ones we needed to focus on more than others made a huge difference as well. Oh yes, I cannot forget the workshops I had for parents to inform them and train them on how to work with their child at home in preparation for testing.

The staff member was committed to ensuring that her students were prepared to be successful on all assessments. As she mentioned, she even held workshops to ensure her parents were knowledgeable about the assessments their students were taking.

Theme #2: Validation

Throughout these research data, the theme of validation appeared as essential to Harambee Elementary teachers: the validation that Black people's history was important; the validation that what the teachers were teaching was a valid reform model to help Black students. Validation was defined as the awareness that the work the teachers, students, administration, and school was doing was valuable to all people. Research about African-centered education reinforces the importance of being valued and validated for who you are as a Black. The key principles of African-centered Education focuses on validating the history and contribution of Black people (Hilliard, 2000).

As the interview progressed, Kuumba explained how the school validated some of her beliefs. She recalled her first year at the school and described how she was able to use the skills she acquired while living in Africa to produce levels of student engagement and achievement. "My first year was very exciting. I was able to use many of the skills that I acquired in Africa." She was proud of her ability to connect with the students through the arts. As we continued the interview, I shared a poem that we recited regularly at Harambee Elementary during weekly Harambee celebrations. The poem was titled "I Am Somebody" (see Appendix F). I asked her to listen as I recited the poem and reflect on how it made her feel. She said:

I used it [the poem] personally. We are all somebody. The school let everybody be an individual. We had rules that we all must follow but we were all individual. A lot of kids came out of schools where they were not anybody. They were yelled at and belittled in school. The kids probably thought the teacher probably did not care if they lived or died. They probably did not want them to come to school. That was the opposite of my experiences at [Harambee].

After Kuumba shared her reflections about the poem, I asked her to select a different poem that reflected her experiences at the school to share during the second interview. Kuumba shared the following poem:

Art vs. Trade

By James Weldon Johnson

Trade, Trade versus Art,
Brain, Brain versus Heart;
Oh, the earthiness of these hard-hearted times,
When clinking dollars, and jingling dimes,
Drown all the finer music of the soul.

Life as an Octopus with but this creed,
That all the world was made to serve his greed;
Trade has spread out his mighty myriad claw,
And drawn into his foul polluted maw,
The brightest and the best,
Well-nigh,
Has he drained dry?
The sacred fount of Truth;
And if, forsooth,
He has left yet some struggling streams from it to go,
He has contaminated so their flow,
That Truth, scarce is it true.

Poor Art with struggling gasp,
Lies strangled, dying in his mighty grasp;
He locks his grimy fingers 'bout her snowy throat so tender.
Is there no power to rescue her, protect, defend her?
Shall Art be left to perish?
Shall all the images her shrines cherish
Be left to this iconoclast, to vulgar Trade?

Oh, that mankind had less of Brain and more of Heart,
Oh, that the world had less of Trade and more of Art;
Then would there be less grinding down the poor,
Then would men learn to love each other more;
For Trade stalks like a giant through the land,
Bearing aloft the rich in his high hand,
While down beneath his mighty ponderous tread,
He crushes those who cry for daily bread.

I asked Kuumba to explain why she selected the poem. She explained that art has a deeper meaning, just like African-centered education. She said you can find art in everything, and it is a part of our craft, our culture. She stated that children love to create, and the meaning is deeper than it appears. Kuumba then began to talk about the administration of the school. She made reference to the administrator and the effect she had on academic and social achievement. She stated, “The Administrator did not allow teachers to degrade students.” She valued teachers and students. She explained how the principal’s style was like walking art, and everyone gravitated to her. She recalled times when the school and the administrator’s leadership was questioned by the Midwestern district’s leadership. She described how the school’s staff worked together to support the school and leadership to validate the African-centered education.

She explained:

They [the district of my inquiry] has to know it worked [African-centered education] well for their own reason. They could have easily stopped the administrator, though she was not easily stopped. They know it worked. They wanted it to continue in their own way, with their own budget.

Kuumba’s beliefs concerning the Midwestern district were deep. She had strong emotional attachment to the school and the leader. This interview was emotional because I could tell through her voice that her comments were sincere. As Kuumba shared her remarks, we were both almost in tears. She had the following to say about the school and what she believed. She proclaimed:

Well, there will never be another school like [Harambee]. I can definitely tell you that. It just is not. I guess we all knew that when we were working there in the back of our minds. Even when we grumbled about doing this or that on a daily basis, we did it because we knew there was no place like [Harambee]. We were kind of like a family. It was a super great place to work. Every teacher that worked there, especially me, well, I will speak for me. Every teacher that worked at [Harambee] that really listened and believed in the philosophy is still an

[African-centered teacher]. I think anyone of us would speak out against things that did not support the students in our current position. I would not be the teacher I am today, if it were not for [Harambee]. Even though the school is not there, we are still [African-centered] teachers.

Personal beliefs. In CRP through African-centered methods, validating the history and the experiences of the students' ancestors is crucial to the students' academic success in school (Gay, 2000). During the course of the theme validation, these data exposed personal and professional experiences dealing with Blacks' history and culture. Several of the surveys and interviews revealed how personal beliefs led teachers to work at the school. Personal beliefs were defined as assumptions based on experiences that form truths about the world (Sleeter & Cornbleth, 2011). The teachers' comments suggested that they held strong personal beliefs regarding their experiences with education and culture in the United States.

During one of my interviews with Kuumba, she discussed how her beliefs led her to teach at the school. She explains how centering the child in culture influences academic excellence:

I liked to talk to my kids about history and things that happened in their life. I would use the book of the month to discuss history with the kids. I also decorated my classroom with cultural masks and fabrics. I had pictures of famous Blacks on my walls. I would ask my students to share information about their families. I displayed their work on my walls too. I really believed this helped them excel academically.

Based on these data, personal beliefs supported high levels of student achievement at Harambee Elementary. The staff personally believed in the students and their ability to achieve. In some respects, the concept of personal beliefs held by the staff at the school suggests that strong beliefs and success influenced student achievement. That is, they worked together to establish central ideas, which in turn equaled student success.

Self-identity. The second interpretive code that resonated through the theme validation was self-identity. Statements about Black people and their contributions resonated throughout this code. Self-identity for this inquiry was defined as the beliefs about one's self and culture relevant to how they are viewed in society (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Black students have to identify themselves as a people to be able to understand and appreciate the contributions of other cultures (Khepera, 2007). It was emphasized through all data that being aware of one's African American heritage was important to the student's ability to validate their existence. The following statement from a survey highlighted this interpretive code:

We connected the learning standards to the cultural history of the students. We integrated achievements made by African/African American inventors, scientists, and mathematicians to build self-efficacy in the students.

Through the cultural lessons, the teachers at Harambee were able to connect the students to enhance their sense of self. Additionally, a survey revealed that teachers were able to see student growth and development:

I saw the changes it made in students. They were extremely proud and carried themselves in that manner. They believed they could do anything. It made teaching and learning interesting and necessary.

Cultural awareness. The final interpretive code that informed this theme was cultural awareness. Hilliard (1997) states, "Culture must be guided by an awareness, understanding and utilization of historical conditions, and cultural experiences which shape and give meaning to Black children's reality" (p. xiii). A quote from a survey affirmed that statement: "All students need to experience a connection between themselves and school. The African-centered pedagogy allows that for African American

children.” The survey responses repeatedly accentuated that students of African American descent must be aware of who they are as a people to be successful in society.

A survey respondent revealed how making students aware of their cultural excellence promotes student achievement for African American students. She stated:

The desire to want to educate children about their heritage and learn more myself while infusing state standards to permit learners to articulate via oral and language. I had known some Black History but it just seemed that it wasn't enough for me. For about 90% of my life the media didn't have many positive role models for our children to see. In addition, a lot of African American History had been omitted in the curriculum. And, I knew there was much more to our culture than George Washington Carver and Phyllis Wheatley but I didn't quite know where to find it. I had heard so much about this school. So, that's why I applied for a position at this school.

The participant experienced personal and professional success using cultural awareness to guide her instruction and connect her students to learning.

Participants were willing to use cultural awareness to promote students academically because they personally saw the benefits. The participant surveys overwhelmingly suggested that the student's culture was important to the student's success. One survey respondent suggested that teaching the student about their culture is important to the African American learner academically and socially: “All students need to experience a connection between themselves and school to promote success. The African-centered pedagogy allows that for African American children.” Another survey respondent alleged that teaching students about their culture was just as important as any other reform efforts:

Other educational approaches have been accepted into the mainstream of school reform, based upon research-based inquiry and I believe that it is past time for ACE to become accepted as a best practice model. As well, many have been threatened by this model as because of labeling and misunderstanding of what this model is and is not. I hope this research can extend some validity into common educator's approaches that work in urban inner city sectors and could extend into

any other school using similar approaches and impactful modifications into teaching and learning.

Theme #3: School Culture

These data revealed that an ethical school culture was important to the overall academic and social success at the school. School culture was defined as the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, and attitudes that influence every aspect of the school. According to Gay (2000), the school culture must be conducive to learning. The school culture must take into consideration the values, interactions, and beliefs of all stakeholders (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Schools that support a culturally rich environment embrace racial and cultural diversity to support student achievement.

As the interview continued, we discussed why she believed the students were socially successful. She stated that the school celebrations were contributing factors. She stated that there were many reasons. “It would be between Harambee—they were very memorable.” She was having a hard time stating one activity. “They kind of blend together now. It was very nice and orderly and well run.” She believed a lot of the social behavior had to do with the student activities. She said, “They [Harambee and other celebrations] were structured and the students were honored. The format was good and they were always a little different.” She also talked about how she felt during the celebrations:

I really felt connected during Harambee. The students were so well behaved. They were honored for their behavior and academics. Their parents and administration were there. The students were honored in the gymnasium in front of their peers. I really felt proud and wished everybody in the city could see what wonderful things we were doing. I was so proud.

Kuumba also stated that she believed that the administrator contributed to the culture of the school. She believed this regarding the school administrator:

The administrator was supportive and very smart. She was always fair and very firm. Whenever someone said she would not listen, I'd say that is not true. She did not agree with everything you wanted her to do but she would consider it and tell you maybe we could try it next year. She was very fair.

She explained how the culture of the school was like a family. We all worked collaboratively for the students.

Kuumba was outspoken and committed to the school and believed that it was a viable model for student achievement. She was upset when the district of my inquiry took over the reconfigured African-centered school. She did not believe the process was fair or just. Her convictions echoed through her words and body language.

Pride. The first interpretive code that supported the culture of the school was pride. These data sources revealed that students had pride in the school which translated to a positive school culture. Pride was defined as a positive feeling of respect for the school held by students and staff. These data from all analyzed sources suggested that school pride was important to the overall success of the school. The following statement from a survey respondent reflected how proud her students were of their accomplishments and achievements and that they wanted to share them with everyone:

I remember the times when we were always having media and visitors from all over the USA coming into our classrooms to observe. My students never missed a beat. They were so proud to show others what they were learning and what they already knew. Reciting poems that affirmed our belief in ourselves as African Americans showed others we were a powerful force to be reckoned with. Here we were, this urban school, a part of a struggling district; yet we were successful and proud of it!

The teacher was proud of her students and her students were proud to share what that had learned through their studies. The pride in the teacher's comments was evidence as to why her African American students were able to be successful in an urban school.

An excerpt from the Harambee School Teacher Handbook affirms that using pride encourages students to do their best in school. The handbook places special importance on the Code of Ma'at, a protocol that students and teachers are required to follow to instill pride in themselves. The code reflects principles of responsibility, relationships, and education. The following is an excerpt from the teacher handbook that provides suggestions for instilling pride in the students:

- Make learning interesting. You can never be too innovative, creative, novel, exciting, vibrant, or enthusiastic.
- Make school a pleasant experience by creating a positive environment and rapport.
- Success breeds success. Plan for every student to experience success consistently.
- Positive reinforcement. Give immediate feedback. (Facial expression, verbal praise, marks, privileges, honors, prizes).
- Competition—against self and others.
- Raising students' level of concern—not so much to cause anxiety but enough so that they will feel a need to succeed.
- Stimulate their imagination and tickle their curiosity.
- Make education relevant. Demonstrate to students why the skill or information is important.
- Involve students in the learning process and give them a degree of control over the destiny of the lesson.
- Modeling by the instructor. Don't expect students to believe in your product (an education) if you don't. (Midwestern School Curriculum Plan, p. 3)

Traditions/celebrations. The second interpretive code that contributed to the school culture theme was traditions and celebrations. Through these data I discovered that the school celebrated the staff and students often, academically and socially.

Traditions and celebrations were defined as routines, rituals, and experiences that can be generalized from Africa that celebrate academic and social achievement (Hilliard, 1997).

The school held weekly Harambee celebrations that stressed the academic and social

achievements of its students. All stakeholders were invited to the weekly event, including parents.

According to the school's teacher handbook, Harambee was a non-negotiable; all staff and students were required to participate. According to the document, the goal of Harambee was to pull together, unite, meditate, and focus on goals and objectives for the week. The students recited poetry, meditated, and were honored for their weekly academic and social achievements. A survey respondent explained how she had to ensure parents and community members that Harambee was relevant and not a waste of critical academic time. She shared the following experience:

The SAC chairperson was married to a prominent minister in the black community. Although supportive of the school, the Rev. had limited or no knowledge of African-centered education. He expressed concerns about the inclusion in our curriculum requiring students to gather as a school body once per week to participate in Harambee—a time to give recognition to classmates and themselves for their weekly accomplishments; including cultural rituals and acknowledging pride in their history and cultural heritage. To address the reality of the minister's concerns, beliefs and attitude, I planned a working informational luncheon for three additional ministers, SAC officers, three community leaders and four staff members. At the conclusion of that luncheon a partnership had been forged and the beginning of one of the most successful schools in the Midwestern district system emerged, from this group evolved one of the largest and most involved parent/community support groups in the urban core.

The respondent's experience was valuable in creating an understanding of why the celebrations were necessary to support student achievements. Also her experience illustrated how a school's culture can develop and evolve over time.

The school's culture not only reflected the accomplishments of the students, but also those of the staff. A survey revealed that the leadership recognized the staff on a regular basis. She stated that a teacher's hard work did not go unnoticed. She declared

that she had received several awards during the Harambee celebrations and believed that Harambee was a very important part of her tenure at the school. She explained:

I believe “Kujichagulia” stands out as the most responsive best practice that I achieved as an educator. I was able to assist students in believing in themselves and never giving up. Kujichagulia is a Kiswahili word that means self-determination. The school held a Harambee (Pulling together) celebration once a week to highlight the social and academic achievement of students. The celebration was called the T.O.P.S (Totally Outstanding Proud Students). Our T.O.P.S program and the Kujichagulia self-management program held our students accountable for their actions. They learned that positive behavior and good work ethics brought about positive rewards, privileges and acknowledgments.

Indeed, the participant believed that rituals and celebration played a significant role in the social and academic success of the students. The respondent affirms that celebrations and traditions motivate students to do their best inside school and outside in the community.

School leadership. School leadership was the final interpretive code that informed the theme of school culture. These data from all sources revealed that the school’s leadership added greatly to the overall success of the school. For this inquiry, school leadership was defined as the leaders in the building who cultured and established an African-centered framework of education to ensure that student achievement was at the center of all school practices (Hilliard, 1997). A response from an interview revealed that the school principal was instrumental in the school culture. The participant described a detailed story of her conversation with a reporter about the school’s principal:

The reporter said, I don’t see why the principal has to be the principal at Harambee. If she is a good principal, she can be a principal anywhere. I said, Yeah but she would not be a principal anywhere, she would only be a principal at Harambee. He said what does that mean? I said that it how she is a principal, if that is what you are trying to ask. I said you could not just put “our” principal at any school, then she would not be a principal. I said no, it would not work. I said if you have an administrator that is setting the tone and living that life [cultural relevant]. He said, “Oh.”

The teachers I interviewed, the responses from surveys, and the parent newsletter I analyzed, affirmed that the school's leadership was instrumental in creating a culturally relevant climate that contributed to the school's culture. A response from a survey explained how the administration ensured the staff had all the resources they needed to be successful:

The administration would invest time and monies to ensure that staff received professional development from master scholars of culturally relevant pedagogy. This would then reflect in their instruction as well as relationships with students, parents and the community.

The parents also believed that the school leadership was an asset to the school and for the students. Data retrieved from a parent SAC meeting publicized that the parents supported the direction the school was going and were willing to protect the school's principal by any means necessary. The following excerpt from a parent newsletter exemplified their support, "Thank you [principal] for caring so much about our children and their future...and remember that you're not alone."

The staff supported the school leadership and affirmed that the school leadership believed in them personally and professionally. Several surveys noted that the school leadership set the tone and pace of the school. They believed the students' social behavior could be attributed to the discipline plan that was consistently enforced by the school's principal. One respondent stated, "I think when [the principal] challenged the parents and students to accept and adhere to [Harambee's] discipline policy; it was based on her beliefs and her own personal experiences. It was her consistency that made the plan effective."

Theme #4: Curriculum and Pedagogy

Throughout the interview with Kuumba, the theme curriculum and pedagogy were apparent to the success of the students and the school. Curriculum and pedagogy was defined as the “what” and “how” being taught in the classroom. This theme was important for the overall academic and social success of the students. Nobles (2000) articulated that curriculum is the foundation for the school. A strong African-centered curriculum is rooted in cultural relevance, academic excellence, and character development (Lee, 1992). The school followed the traditional district and state standards, but infused the culture, history, and experiences of African/African Americans in all subjects. The curriculum was informed by the Code of Ma’at and the Principles of the Nguzo Saba (Khepera, 2000).

When my questions began to focus on the academic success of the students who attended Harambee, she immediately mentioned the curriculum. She seemed to feel comfortable discussing the African-centered curriculum. She said, “The curriculum allowed students to study African animals, basket weaving, and sculptures. The students knew about abstracts and their history came from Africa. We also studied African American and African people.” She smiled a lot when discussing the curriculum and was able to recall the events as if they had happened yesterday. She stated,

The students were very interested. I loved when students picked their own projects to be displayed from activities that they had learned throughout the year. The character development in curriculum required students to write reports and present the information to the class and sometimes the school. Students really wanted to learn about their culture.

She also felt that professional development retreats were an important aspect of the curriculum. The teachers were able to study and collaborate with each other to gain a

better understanding of the curriculum. The teachers also learned from and through each other during the retreats. Kuumba stated that the professional development retreats were a time for staff bonding. She stated:

I really think our retreats were really meaningful to me. They still stay in my mind. Everything we did everything we talked about. I know the kids were not there during that time, but it was all about the things we were going to do when we worked with the kids and incorporate into our teaching so it was about the kids even though they were not really present.

I asked Kuumba to recall one of her most memorable lessons that she thought supported high levels of student achievement. She stated that it was hard for her to select one. She described a lesson in which the students had to create African sculptures. She described how the students had to draw the sculpture on paper first. Next they had to create the sculpture use clay. The students also had to paint the sculpture and put it in the kiln. She stated this was a rewarding activity that allowed students to use many skills they had acquired in her class.

Cultural consciousness. The first interpretive code that was prevalent throughout these data was cultural consciousness. This code was defined as the school's cultural programming that placed the African American student in the center of all learning. Some researchers believed that centering the child in their culture would take away from the skills they needed to be successful in life. Other researchers disagreed and stated that the students could have a culturally relevant education that supported high levels of academic achievement (Hamilton, 1968).

Data from one of the survey respondents revealed why her family decided to send their child to Harambee Elementary: "We believed that the curriculum would not only allow him to excel academically, but would build his self-confidence and reinforce the

importance of embracing his cultural identity in a nurturing environment.” A similar statement from an interview resonated with me about the idea that culture and academic skills can coexist in an effective learning environment. This respondent proclaimed:

I infused and made cultural references in all subjects, even recess. I believe this helped students build self-confidence because if their ancestors could do it so could they. I believe in the students and I believed it really worked.

According to a document that I analyzed, the School’s Improvement Plan, the curriculum is a national reform model for academic excellence and cultural consciousness. The school foundation was based on the beliefs that African American students learned best when they could connect with the curriculum.

Key to understanding the ACE curriculum is understanding the primary goal of its existence. According to the African-centered Curriculum Plan, the primary goal was to “enable students to view concepts and issues from more than one perspective and to consider the point of view of African culture’s impact or influence by event, issue or concept being studied” (p. 3).

The curriculum provides the basis for ACE. Instead of relying only on the traditional curriculum to dictate what the teachers must teach and the students must learn, the ACE curriculum was infused with culture and traditional standards. According to Asante (1991/1992), children who are centered in their own cultural information are better students, more disciplined, and have greater motivation for school work.

Professional development/training. Another interpretive code that was present in the theme of curriculum and pedagogy was professional development/training. This theme was apparent throughout these data. This interpretive code was defined as the preparation that was necessary to increase the cultural growth and academic knowledge

of teachers to increase student achievement. These data informed me that the majority of the staff members who worked at the school had limited prior knowledge with CRP through African-centered education before being hired. The teachers had to be trained in the methodology of African-centered education in order to effectively implement the curriculum to the students. The cultural skills and knowledge teachers received was imperative for the successful implementation of the curriculum. A response from a survey explained how valuable the training was for the participant's classroom success:

We were taught how to use language translation skills to assist students in the mastery of Standard English. Also, we were encouraged to contextualize learning which made deeper understanding and connections for our learners. Learners were seen as family to staff, which made students feel welcome and part of the school. I think this helped them stay motivated to learning and produce high levels of achievement.

The school's accountability plan affirmed the above-mentioned response. It stressed that all educators and parents would have access to professional development activities that promoted the continuous improvement and modifications of instructions leading to the success of all students. The purpose of professional development was to inform staff's understanding of culture so that they could reform the traditional curriculum into one that was more culturally relevant. This training allowed teachers to learn best practices, use the traditional curriculum and infuse the culture of the students. One interview respondent stated, "I also believe that a school can be successful with just good, strong teaching. But, when you only strive for high academics you are not preparing the child for a well-rounded life."

African-centered curriculum. The final interpretive code under the theme curriculum and pedagogy is the curriculum itself. Throughout these data the African-centered curriculum was emphasized as a blueprint for instruction in an African-centered

school. Hilliard (1997) affirms that the curriculum must reflect the traditions, history, and experiences of the heritage of the students being taught. He continues that most teacher education programs do not place an emphasis on the importance of the curriculum relevant to students of color. He proclaims that teachers will not be effective educating students if they have no recollection of where they have been or where they are going. African-centered curriculum for this inquiry is defined as the culturally relevant courses offered that emphasize the history, culture, and experiences of African/African American people (Hilliard, 1997).

A survey respondent stated the curriculum was her guide to understanding African-centered education. She believed through the curriculum she was able to gain a better understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy. She stated:

The curriculum allowed me to infuse and make cultural references in all subjects, even recess. I believe this helped students build self-confidence because if their ancestors could do it so could they. I believe in the students and I believed it [curriculum] really worked.

Kuumba is currently working for the district of my inquiry. She stated that many of the activities that she was able to achieve at Harambee, she is not able to do at her current school. She also stated that she still employs some of the skills she obtained from working at Harambee, because she believes the skills are relevant to all students. She was excited and interested in my research inquiry results.

Case 2: Nia

I knew Nia, a black teacher, prior to this inquiry. I worked with her for five years at Harambee Elementary. She was energetic and easy-going. She developed and

sustained relationships with her students. She was confident and always supportive of African-centered education. She worked hard to learn all she could about African-centered methods so she could transfer the knowledge she acquired to her students. She taught at Harambee Elementary for five years. She was a teacher prior to her tenure at Harambee Elementary. She taught second and fourth grade.

Nia and I did not keep in touch through the years, but I could always depend on her to support educational research and/or children. She was always a person I admired for her commitment to children and her passion for education. I chose the pseudonym Nia for the second participant because she had a purpose and a passion to provide children a quality education. The Kiswahili name Nia means “to make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.” I often witnessed her helping students and parents live up to their full potential.

Nia and I met at the library to conduct our interviews. We were excited to see each other because we had not seen or been in contact with each for several years. When we started the interview it seemed as if time stood still. She walked into the interview wearing beautiful African attire. She greeted me with a smile and a hug before we began the interview.

I was excited to interview Nia because she was so passionate about children and African-centered education. The first few questions I asked her concerned what she did at the school of inquiry and why she stayed at the school. Her recall and memory was fascinating. She spoke with confidence, and it was clear she had something relevant to say.

Expectations. Throughout the interview, Nia spoke about the high expectations she held for herself and her students. She also felt it was necessary for her students to have high expectations for themselves. She believed if the students believed in themselves, they could do anything. She recalled a memorable moment:

One of the most rewarding experiences at this school was when I had a second grade class that was really challenging academically and socially. They had blank faces when I handed them a journal and I told them that we will write every day. I asked them to share what they wanted to learn that school year. They scribbled and drew pictures. They commented, “I don’t know what to say, I don’t want to write and this is hard!” After days and much Kujichagulia, they began to write short sentences. I didn’t care. They were writing. As the year progressed, they began to write more and more. By the end of the year, they were writing multiple paragraphs and wanting to share their thoughts. Then, I received the word from my principal that I would loop with my class to third grade! I said, “Okay.”

She had high expectations for her students. She let me know that some of her former students kept in contact with her and are currently attending college. She had high expectations for her students and parents. Nia expected her students to work in the community by completing projects. She said, “Every month we had a project to complete that was going to help the community become better. The projects were always centered on a community need. They also made me proud of my students.” She became emotional as she talked about her students and how they lived up to her expectations. She also stated that she expected the parents to help their children with homework and they did. She said, “All the parents were helping the children. Most of all the parents were awesome.”

Nia talked about how the administration had high expectations of the staff but supported their efforts. She made the following statements regarding the administrator:

The expectations of the principal for the students and the staff to learn about their culture. I followed her like a role model. She treated me like a daughter. When I was dealing with personal problems, she helped me. She made you feel like you

were important, so in turn you treated the children the same way. She would not have had it any other way. She held everyone accountable to infuse ACE into every subject. She visited our classroom often. Not in a punitive way but to see the great things we were doing with culture in our classroom. She believed in the staff. The staff stayed—stability made us strong. The whole staff believed.

During one of my interviews with Nia, she shared how her commitments led her to be a better teacher. She described how at the beginning of each year she asked her students what they wanted to learn. She explained how her commitment was confirmed when she asked a group of students what they wanted to learn:

Well, once again, I asked them [her students], “What do you want to learn this year?” This time, I put more criteria to their writing. Students began writing without reservations. At the end of the year, I asked the students, “What have you learned?” When I reviewed their journals, students were writing seven to ten pages of their accomplishments. Many of the students from this class went on to college preparatory schools or to suburban schools with much success! I kept in touch with many of my students. Many are now in their second and third year of college with nearly or full ride scholarships! This was the most rewarding experience for me.

Nia’s commitment to her students was evident and guided by a simple question, “What do you want to learn this year?” Based on her comments what her students learned that year permeated to future successes.

Validation. Nia’s comments were parallel to a response from a survey response. The survey illustrated that the participants decided to work at Harambee for very personal reasons. They believed in the concept of teaching students about their culture. One of the survey participants stated, “My interest in African-centered education is a life experience. My daily practice is based on educational experience that utilizes cultural intellect and traditions, as well as processes taken from Africa and the diaspora.” Clearly the respondent had a personal desire to continue connecting culture and history with education.

Another survey participant talked about how African-centered education dispelled myths from her childhood. She stated:

On a personal level, African studies enlightened me about my heritage and all that I did not know or learn that our culture had accomplished. As a child, I was told Timbuktu was a terrible place and I was threatening with being sent there for inappropriate behavior.

I felt relaxed interviewing Nia. Her passion for African-centered education was evident throughout the entire process. I was so interested in what she had to say that our conversation sometimes drifted off task; we would quickly refocus and repurpose our conversation back to the interview questions. I asked Nia several questions regarding where her passion came from and why she stayed at Harambee Elementary School. She was frank in her responses. She said she believed in African-centered education because it helped her son and daughter become more rooted in their culture and heritage. She also explained that African-centered education made her feel validated as a person and an African American educator.

She described her first year teaching at the school as an eye-opening experience.

Nia's passion in her response explained why she stayed:

The school provided a lot of confirmation for things I knew but could not prove. The staff was very nice and helpful, always willing to help. There were no stupid questions. It was a family. I had been teaching 17 years but never experienced anything like that. My self-esteem was projected because before it was like they did not see me. My class was in the media for doing excellent academic work.

As the interview continued, I shared the poem "I Am Somebody" with Nia. I asked her to describe how the poem made her feel and her overall reaction to the poem. She said the poem made her think about all the students at the school. She explained that everybody was special regardless of their race or economic status in society. She also

stated that the poem was special because she remembered saying it with her students in class and during Harambee celebrations.

I asked Nia to reflect on her experiences at Harambee Elementary School and find a poem that she felt emphasized her experiences at the school. She selected the following poem:

Booker T. and W.E.B.
Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois

By Dudley Randall

“It seems to me,” said Booker T.,
“It shows a mighty lot of cheek
To study chemistry and Greek
When Mister Charlie needs a hand
To hoe the cotton on his land,
And when Miss Ann looks for a cook,
Why stick your nose inside a book?”

“I don’t agree,” said W.E.B.
“If I should have the drive to seek
Knowledge of chemistry or Greek,
I’ll do it. Charles and Miss can look
Another place for hand or cook,
Some men rejoice in skill of hand,
And some in cultivating land,
But there are others who maintain
The right to cultivate the brain.”

“It seems to me,” said Booker T.,
“That all you folks have missed the boat
Who shout about the right to vote,
And spend vain days and sleepless nights
In uproar over civil rights.
Just keep your mouths shut, do not grouse,
But work, and save, and buy a house.”

“I don’t agree,” said W.E.B.
“For what can property avail
If dignity and justice fail?
Unless you help to make the laws,
They’ll steal your house with trumped-up clause.

A rope's as tight, a fire as hot,
No matter how much cash you've got.
Speak soft, and try your little plan,
But as for me, I'll be a man."

"It seems to me," said Booker T.—
"I don't agree,"
Said W.E.B.

Nia explained why she selected the poem and how it was relevant to this research inquiry.

She stated:

My first impression of this poem was that this was a powerful poem that communicated how an educator and social leader were concerned about what was best for our people! I had always had an appreciation for both of these men. However, it deepened a little more when I read how eloquent they were in their speech when Randall Dudley put it to pen to communicate their ideas on the state and fate of African Americans.

I too felt a sense of urgency as some of the same issues plague our society through what is better known as the "Hidden Curriculum." I love this poem because both leaders capture the essence of the importance of the social and political issues that were plaguing our society in the twentieth century. Both leaders had valid platforms that needed to be addressed. Both leaders had values that were critical to the success of the African American society but the issues seemed to be which issue should come first.

Poetry has always been a form of communication at [Harambee Elementary]. Here was another avenue or opportunity for my students to express their ideas and bring politics, social tribulations, and American History and language arts to the classroom. This was another example of how I infused African Studies into the curriculum while utilizing state standards.

School culture. Throughout the interview I could feel how the culture of the school permeated through most of Nia's responses. Nia described how the culture of the school contributed to the school's social and academic success:

Staff and students were engaged in learning. Immediately upon entering the building, there was an essence of self-pride and being valued that captured your spirit. You could hear teachers teaching and students speaking with confidence. The hallways were quiet and clean. You were greeted with smiles. It was a warm and inviting feeling. Teachers exhibited pride in their craft as educators. Teachers modeled excellence through instruction. You could view student work on bulletin

boards inside and outside the classroom with state standards and project based learning. African artifacts were everywhere. Students and staff were in appropriate uniform so that the emphasis could be on learning. It was awesome to see!

Nia also talked about how she immersed herself in the culture of the school through her actions and as a way of life. She made the following statements:

I connected to the language; clothing and it made me feel special. I loved the family feel. I loved when the African vendors would come to the school and we all could buy African artifacts. It was as if I was coming home. It was not a hard transition. I needed to grow as a person—fourteen years in the same school—I need something different. There was so much history in the school. I learned that I am my brother and sister’s keeper.

Nia visualized a Monday morning at Harambee Elementary, then described what she could remember. This is what she illustrated:

Students rushing to get to the auditorium for “Harambee.” Parents filling the bleachers to participate in the weekly celebration of students. The sounds of the African Drums communicating that it was Monday Morning! Staff and students dressed in school uniform. Students seated in rows according to grade level. It was exciting to see! Each month a grade level was responsible for leading Harambee which included greetings, call and response and monthly poems. Everyone participated, including students, staff, parents, community leaders, friends and any special guest. This was a time for the village to come together and get the news and any special events better known as “Habari Gani.”

As I stated earlier in my conversation, this was a time of celebration! There were incentives for students to do their best! So, students had levels of achievement, recognition and rewards. When students exhibited academic and social gains for six to eight weeks, they received pins of red, black, green and purple being the highest. Each child and their family were invited to come and stand by their child and take a picture. Our principal gave the honor of pinning each child. Pictures were posted on our “Wall of Excellence” for everyone to see! There were opportunities for students to go on special field trips in honor of exhibiting academic, social growth and very good attendance. This was also a time to make any announcements about any important events that were going to occur that may affect the village/school. Finally recognition of any special guest or special speakers. Students were attentive. It was all about respect. It was fun and lively!

Nia was excited to share what she recalled about a Monday morning at the school.

It was quiet as I reflected what she described. We were both emotional and reflective. I

had to pause for a moment before I was able to continue the interview. She regained composure and described what happened during an interview with a reporter that visited her classroom when she worked at Harambee Elementary. She said the reporter was asking her why the school was successful. She stated:

Someone from the paper came to our school and asked me why we were successful. I said we believe in the students we have hope for a better tomorrow. The students have value they have worth. He was not expecting me to say that. I felt really proud that I worked at that school.

Curriculum and pedagogy. Like the survey participant, the teacher/staff in-service documents emphasized the importance of the curriculum. The document illustrated how the curriculum supported students academically and socially through curriculum objectives, content and intent. The following is an excerpt:

Curriculum Objectives

1. To support the development of a sense of consciousness, confidence, competence, commitment, and character in the student.
2. To guide development of a well-rounded human being who has the ability, skills and attitude to become a contributing asset to self, family, community, and society.

Curriculum Content

1. Systematically guides the transmission of information and knowledge while simultaneously reinforcing the desire to learn.
2. Consciously attempt to include African and African American contributions to human civilization in every subject area while utilizing and integrating subject specific concepts and skills critical thinking and problem solving.

Curriculum Intent

1. To assist students in (a) achieving mastery of all aspects of human functioning; (b) reproduce and refine themselves in the objective world; and (c) make explicit their personality and character.
2. Providing the students with opportunities to experience success, and to see their own image and interest in the educational experience,
3. Intentionally orchestrated to develop a sense of competence. Confidence and consciousness in the student. (Midwestern School Curriculum Plan, p. 7)

The curriculum was a critical resource at Harambee Elementary. It provided the teacher with relevant information that supported high levels of academic and social achievement through content and the intent of the curriculum. The teachers relied heavily on the curriculum to infuse African and African American history and experiences in all core subjects.

During the interview Nia made reference to the curriculum and why she felt the African-centered pedagogy was important to the social and academic success the students and school achieved. She listed several strategies that she used to ensure student achievement was occurring on a regular basis. The following statements resonated with me:

The curriculum and infusing culture into every subject; walking through expectations daily; using the principles of the Nguzo Saba daily. Also modeling lessons and behaviors. The students followed the Code of Ma'at and were very respectful because of it. My students rarely got in trouble. They all wanted their kente cloth and to be honored during the Harambee celebration.

Nia connected the expectations of the school to the curriculum, which contributed greatly to students' achievement. She also talked about how professional development connected the curriculum and made it applicable to the pedagogy. She stated:

First the professional development confirmed all the things I thought I knew about African American culture was true. The professional development allowed me to understand the curriculum. It also taught me how to connect state standards while infusing African-centered principles.

I asked Nia to describe one of her lessons that infused CRP through African-centered methods. She told me that she had kept many of her lesson because they were all important. She stated she would send me one of the lessons she felt was most relevant to this research inquiry. Nia sent me this lessons she prepared with her fourth grade

students. The following is an example of how she infused African-centered principles with the core curriculum:

Compare and Contrast.

Native American and African Slaves in America

- Students learned about the regions of the U.S.—Geography
- Students learned about the various tribes—Social Studies
- Students compared the mistreatment of the Native Americans and African slaves—Politics
- Students made inferences as to why slaves escaped to Native American tribes and why the Native Americans excepted [sic] them into the communities—Communication Arts
- Students studied the physical features of Native Americans and African Slaves because many Native Americans and Afrikaans entered into interracial marriages—Science & Social Studies
- Students studied Native American and African Slave traditions, culture, communications, foods, artifacts, social interactions, such as music and dance—Social Studies

Then, students were required to choose a tribe, research a particular tribe and create a display that included:

- Name of the tribe and the region which was to include info about the geography of the region with map and key with estimated population—Reference Skills & Mathematics
- Why they chose that particular tribe—Communication Arts
- How the two communities were similar and different and what commonalities they both possessed based upon our study of the unit—Communication Arts
- Student were required to:
 - Write an essay about their findings—Communication Arts
 - traditions, culture, communications, customs, foods, traditions artifacts, social interactions, such as music and dance
 - Create a Venn Diagram that exhibited likenesses and differences of both cultures—Communication Arts
 - FYI – because the learner had become an expert on this particular tribe and has knowledge of its uniqueness—Communication Arts
 - Students were required to give an oral presentation of their research project—Communication Arts

The lesson was rich with culture, history, and hands-on student activities. I asked her if she recalled if the students enjoy the lesson. She stated several of her former students could remember completing the lesson to this day. Nia had several other lessons

she was willing to share, but I wanted just one example for this research inquiry. Nia also talked about why she believed the school was academically and socially successful. She provided the following reasons:

- Teachers who truly cared about students learning
- High expectations for all involved stakeholders
- Students wanting to do their best
- Stability of staff and students
- Good attendance
- Parent involvement and open communication
- Teachers modeling good instruction
- Professional Development to build capacity of the staff to infuse African Studies into the curriculum to meet state standards
- Collaboration between staff and administration
- Celebrations weekly of student accomplishments during “Harambee”
- The freedom to be creative while implementing the curriculum
- Students seeing African Americans that have made a difference in our society, locally and nationally, past and present, in all disciplines
- Providing a platform to show learners that there are no limits to their success
- Self-pride
- Strong administration with a clear vision
- A sense of belonging and being valued
- A family and community atmosphere

At the end of the interview I asked Nia if there anything else she wanted to share.

She expressed how she felt about the Midwestern district taking over the school’s reconfiguration. She shared the following:

[Harambee Elementary] incorporated foreign language into its curriculum, Montessori components, college preparatory with emphasis on African Studies. The leaders that focused on destroying this school robbed the district and moved on to another school district. When are people going to wake up and stand up for our children! Everyone would benefit!

Nia has retired from the Midwestern district of my inquiry and works part time in a nearby district. She stills believes in African-centered education and uses some of the concepts she learned while teaching students at Harambee. She believes that any student

can be empowered to be their best if they understand who they are and where they came from. Furthermore, she believes African-centered education had a positive effect on her personal life.

Case 3: Kujichagulia

I met Kujichagulia, a black teacher, in 1996 while teaching at Harambee Elementary. She was one of the few staff members that was at the school before it became an African-centered school. She was involved in school leadership, parent and community involvement, and school celebrations. She was talented and was able to motivate students, parents, and staff. Kujichagulia and I were not friends outside of work, but I believe we both had the ultimate respect for one another. She was committed to educating students. She taught at the school for 16 years; two years were before it became an African-centered school.

I chose the pseudonym Kujichagulia for her because she was determined to motivate, educate, and stimulate students academically and socially. Kujichagulia means “to define ourselves, to name ourselves, speak for ourselves and create for ourselves.” I thought this name was fitting for her.

I met Kujichagulia at her church to conduct our first interview because that was the most convenient location for her. I had not seen her in quite a while and it was good to see her. She entered the room with a smile. We hugged and shared a short conversation. I explained the confidentiality document; she signed it and kept a copy of it before we began the interview. The interview was relaxed and the conversation seemed to flow. She remembered a lot of information about the school since she was involved in a

lot of activities. We attempted to schedule a second interview several times, but were unable to due to scheduling conflicts.

Expectations. Kujichagulia described how she believed the school changed from a traditional school to an African-centered school. She expressed the following:

I noticed a change in the self-esteem of the students—expectations were much higher. The camaraderie between staff was much higher, too. It was also more interested and fun. We were all learning so much.

Kujichagulia explained why her expectations were so high. She expressed her professional and personal reasons:

I wanted to be in the forefront of helping students achieve. I also liked to lead by example. We all had to stand up. We were all in it together. I was not in it by myself. It was good school. It was an excellent school!

To further emphasize this interpretive code through the documents, I analyzed an excerpt from the African-centered Schools Evaluation report that indicates the teachers and staff at Harambee Elementary were committed to excellence. The report stated about the school:

[Harambee Elementary] classrooms were found to be organized for effort. Most classrooms had rubrics and/or standards posted and samples of student work on display. Seating in all rooms was conducive to both large and small group discussions; several classrooms were observed beginning their lessons with large group discussions. Each classroom visited showed evidence of clear expectations—students knew the purpose and relevance of what they were studying. Student activity observed demonstrated some academic rigor, most often at the basic level of performance (recall of knowledge, organizing information, clarifying answers). Accountable Talk was observed in each classroom visited, although generally to a lesser extent in lower grades. Examples of accountable talk indicators which were observed included use of a variety of talk formats (student to teacher conferences, lectures, small and whole group discussions, etc.); talk which demonstrates commitment to accurate knowledge (offering evidence, asking challenging questions, referencing previous learning); and talk which demonstrates respect for the community of learners (taking turns, active participation, paraphrasing or restating each other's statements, etc.).

The evaluation report hit on several key points that informed the theme of expectation and amplified its relevance to student achievement.

Validation. Kujichagulia expressed that feeling validated motivated her to do more. She explained how helping students achieve academic success in the beginning motivated her to do everything she could to ensure that the success continued. She stated this about AYP:

Getting test scores back showing that we made AYP, which was every year. In addition, the performance troop was rewarding. We worked very hard with the students to prepare them to travel and perform all over the state. It was an African performance troop. The children danced, sang, recited poetry and did speeches. It was so exciting and fun. I believe this also helped the students do well in school, because they had to have good academics and exhibit regular social skills on a regular basis.

Kujichagulia explained how the school contributed to her personally. She stated that she was a committed educator prior to being a member of Harambee Elementary, but the school did motivate her even more. She explained that validation made her even more committed to the school. She explained how her commitment validated her personally:

Personally, the school made me a better a person. We had to be determined to make a difference. We wanted to keep learning about things so we could teach our students. I traveled to Africa in June. That was something that is so important. Students who attended other schools had no concept of their history but ours did. We were their teachers.

She also described one of the events that caused her to feel most committed to the school. She recalled how the uniform policy was a struggle in the beginning:

I remember the uniform mostly. The struggle to get them and how good the students looked wearing them. It was a lot to take on but it was fun. We had to integrate the ACE theme into everything we were doing; all our lessons. We went to Detroit and got a lot ideas from their African-centered school that really helped us in the beginning. It was fun and exciting.

A document that I analyzed during field work, the 2001 Harambee Teacher Handbook, affirmed the above quote. A section in the handbook focused on how teachers could develop students' positive self-image:

One of the goals of the educational program is to help each student develop a positive self-concept. As an important part of the instructional program, teachers should provide for students to: Maintain a winner's attitude, increase self-confidence and respect for self and others, take pride in their ethnic background, culture and heritage, exhibit self-direction and self-control, and accept responsibility for their actions.

And in 2006, the handbook reemphasized the following concerning building students' positive self-identity:

Progress towards the school's goals for affirmative self-identity is assured when educators frequently provide students with:

- A positive attitude towards self, school, and community
- Opportunities for success
- Positive reinforcement of choices, efforts, and accomplishments
- Encouragement to assume responsibility for their own learning
- Information regarding strengths, weaknesses, and progress
- Opportunities to use true Kujichagulia [self-determination] when making choices, to be self-directing and to participate in self-checking
- Encouragement to apply Nia [purpose] in achieving daily attendance. (Harambee Teacher Handbook, p. 48)

School culture. Throughout the interview, Kujichagulia noted the commitment of the staff as well as herself as factors that contributed to the school environment. She explained how the pledge of the staff added to the culture of the school. She stated:

I was always committed. I would come early and stay late. I was on lots of committees. I was on the state assessment testing committee to make sure our students were prepared. We taught our kids this poem. We brought meaning to the poem so they could understand our struggles.

I asked Kujichagulia to listen to the poem "I Am Somebody" and describe how it made her feel. She said:

The teachers made it clear to the students, you are people you are somebody. We are somebody. We created a major passport to excellence. The lessons we taught were valuable. I am still learning from the lessons I learned of how our people came to be a part of this world. How our people came to be in existence.

I asked Kujichagulia to select a poem to share during the second interview that reflected her experiences at Harambee Elementary School. She selected the following poem she wrote in 1997 regarding the principal of the school:

The Queen Mother

As the Queen of the Nile,
She walks with beauty and grace.
Her bestowing lustrous pearls,
Illuminates the love for her race.
Her kindness so meek,
Her humbleness so mild.
The gentleness of a newborn child.
She protects her child,
From the wrath of society.
Just doing her job,
Not searching for notoriety.
When adversities become tough,
She's a diamond in the rough.
She's a jewel from the ark,
She's pure radiance in the dark.
So behold Queen Mother!
Our story is yet untold.
Be steadfast in time,
For you will shine as pure gold.

After Kujichagulia read the poem, I knew the pseudonym selected for her was a perfect fit. Kujichagulia explained why she wrote and selected the poem to share during this inquiry. She stated the following reasons:

I wrote this poem during a lunch break of one of our many summer professional developments with a scholar on African-centered education. It was held at Webster University in Kansas City, Missouri. The professor was explaining the term or name, Queen Mother. From what I can remember, it is given or blessed upon those who provide guidance and takes care of the people of her village. She shares her wisdom and knowledge and helps to educate others. She takes on the role of a quiet leader.

It was at this professional development that our principal was blessed with the title Queen Mother. We were told to go forth in our mission supporting her as our leader and carrying out the major task at hand. We were told to let no one stand in our way. Because she believed, we believed, and others believed and we became a force to be reckoned with.

Curriculum and pedagogy. All through the interview Kujichagulia talked about how the curriculum contributed to the academic and social achievement of the students. She stated, “It really depended on the teacher” when talking about the impact of the curriculum on the student. She believed, “You had to speak as if you knew even if you did not.” She was adamant that teachers had to engross themselves in the curriculum to support high levels of student achievement. She said this in reference to the teachers: “They [the teachers] go home and study, so you could know what you were talking about the next lesson.” She continued, “Also, put it on the kids. Ask them about their culture.” She stated that she encouraged the students to be a part of the lesson. She said, “They [the students] brought pictures and shared family stories. They [the students] helped me embed culture into the lesson.”

Kujichagulia also clarified how teachers infused the district curriculum with the African-centered curriculum. She said:

We used the regular curriculum [the state/district curriculum], and we had to infuse our ACE curriculum. We had to embed culture into every lesson. We used Nguzo Saba and Code of Ma’at. We made sure the students knew what it meant. We used the language. We would say you are not acting Ma’atic [positive behavior], you are being isfitic [negative behavior]. European American teachers also brought into the program. We had some really good teachers. My daughter thrived in the program. Every day she learned something new.

Kujichagulia explained that infusing African-centered principles with the traditional curriculum was not an option; it was required. “We had to infuse African-

centered culture in all subjects.” She explained how the students felt about the curriculum:

The students saw people that looked just like them in every subject. The students even saw themselves in math. We counted with Kiswahili numbers. We talked about African American mathematicians and scientists. We were taught to teach students to believe in what they knew. The infusion had an effect and they were ready to tell and show. Requiring the students to stand and deliver and look you in the eyes—they stood a different way.

She explained how the administration reinforced the curriculum. She said, “We had a very strong administrator. She was in the classroom all the time ensuring that we were teaching the curriculum.” She said she admired the administrator, but said sometimes she was tough.

When I asked her if she had anything else to say that could contribute to this research inquiry, she said:

I think you should talk to former students of the school. I think it would be interesting to hear what they have to say. Several [former students] are working in classroom as teachers. Former students are teaching. They talk about [Harambee Elementary] all the time. They stand with confidence. My niece’s life was changed by attending the school. The change it made in my family’s history. The history....

Kujichagulia has retired from the district of my inquiry. She currently works for a neighboring school district. She still believes in African-centered education and uses it in her current position. She also works with the youth at her church and regularly uses some of the things she learned at the school. She stated the children at her church have benefited from the character development, history, and poetry. She had the following to say about a recent trip to Africa:

After experiencing ACE in Africa, I am convinced that schools in American urban core will benefit from implementing similar strategies. Additionally I feel that children of color and educators lack knowledge of the importance of inclusion of self in the European curriculum taught in all schools.

A survey response acknowledged what Kujichagulia had described. The response elicited the following story about one child calling another child an inappropriate name and the teacher being able to use the curriculum to explain how the name was not indicative of the student's cultural heritage. She asserted:

Because the culturally responsive pedagogy included a set of character/academic standards that were accepted by staff and students, I could use that framework to point out how the name he was called didn't serve as validation to who he was.

Case 4: Imani

Imani, a black teacher, worked at the school for only three years before it relocated and reconfigured to a K-9 configuration. She moved with the school to its new location. She made huge strides in student achievement during her time at the school. She was a smart person who knew a lot about history. She earned her national board certification during her tenure at the school. Her classroom management style was student-centered. She always encouraged the students to do their best and held them accountable for their actions. I thought she was one of the most caring teachers on staff. I chose the name Imani for her because she had faith in the curriculum and believed it would help African American students be success. Imani means "to believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers and our leaders."

When I talked to Imani, it was as if time had stood still. We laughed a lot, asked about each other's families, and discussed our current positions. She was easy to talk to and spoke passionately about her memories and experiences regarding the school.

Expectations. Imani talked about her first year teaching at the school and how much that she learned reframed her expectations for her students. She stated the following:

My first year—I learned what real education is about—Effective administration yes, effective administration—I saw what that really looked like. There were high expectations for students and staff. It was modeled daily! This was so different from my other school. It was rough. [At my previous school there were] extreme discipline problems—low expectations. ACE was engaged with culturally relevant information. I learned about Kwanzaa and the principles—I knew this helped character development without even knowing it.

Imani had high expectations for her students on a daily basis. She encouraged her students to engage in challenging activities. She stated that everyone at the school was involved in creating high expectations for students. She proclaimed:

I believe that high expectations, consistent consequences, accountability and three-way communications are factors that help with academics and social behavior. The parents must be a part of the equations!

She recalled some of the strategies that made the school successful academically.

She stated the following:

The school taught test taking strategies and vocabulary. All classrooms and teachers believe the kids could achieve. We expected them to achieve. We also explained that test taking strategies would help students in life. I believe that parent involvement was critical to student success. I also believe that we developed pride into our students.

School culture. Imani explained how the culture of the school was developed through the commitment of the staff. She described how the African-centered Coordinator set the tone of the school by his words and knowledge. She stated, “When the African Coordinator speaks—He shares so much knowledge with the students. He is passing on the legacy to the students and they love it!” She emphasized that the culturally relevant conversations contributed to student academic achievement and social behaviors. The conversations with students often occurred during celebrations such as Harambee. She recalls how the celebrations contributed to the social behavior of the students. She recalled the following:

I also remember participating in Harambee every morning in my classroom. We did the bus stop on Fridays. The kids loved it. When I see students that were in my class, they still remember the bus stop. We were like a family. Everybody participated in Harambee, even the staff and parents.

I shared the poem, “I Am Somebody” with Imani. She immediately stated “I remember that poem,” and began to recite the poem with me. She even remembered the motions that went along with the poem. I asked her how the poem made her feel and if it brought back any memories. She stated:

Mutual respect...I say respect children emotional and physically in class—
Foundation. Students must feel safe to learn and grow. Looking for, recognizing and appreciating the gifts of each child. Even the kids that get on your nerves—you got to find their gifts. Individual gifts of the children you work with in the classroom. You must refer to the Nguzo Saba principles daily. Discipline. Kujichagulia. Helping them learn who they are. Cultural stuff is fun. This is a spiritual place that empowers and connects. The students understand that everybody is somebody.

I asked Imani to bring a poem of her choice that she believed reflected her experiences at Harambee Elementary. She selected the following poem:

The Way to Start Your Day

By Linda Michelle Brown

This is the way...hey! We start the day...hey!
We got the knowledge...hey! To go to college...hey!
We won't stop there...hey! Go anywhere...hey!
We and smile...hey! Cause that's our style...hey!
We love each other...hey! Help one another...hey!
There's nothing to it...hey! Just have to do it...hey!
This is the way...hey! We start the day...hey!
Cause we don't play...hey!
Now, what you say...hey!

Imani stated that she selected that poem because her students said it every single morning. It was ingrained in them, and it prepared them to have a good day. She also

stated that it helped her have a good day. That particular poem was used during Harambee and also in each classroom daily.

The school's expectations as illustrated through the accountability plan reinforced the expectations that contributed to student success that Imani described. The school's expectations for student achievement was also evident in the staff handbook. Several references were made in regard to having high standards for students and ways to ensure that achievement was at the forefront of the school's mission and purpose. Giving credence to expectations allowed student achievement to flourish. As the teacher handbook points out, promoting high levels of academic achievement is non-negotiable.

The following are expectations of effective ACE teachers:

1. Giving students more time on academic tasks to stimulate student achievements
2. Emphasize academic achievement and expect all learners to achieve
3. Create classroom routines
4. Display all students work, inside and outside the classroom
5. Monitor student progress. (Harambee School Teacher Handbook, p. 30)

Curriculum and pedagogy. Imani felt at ease as she described factors that contributed to the school's academic success. She remembered all the professional development and training. She explained what she did to increase student achievement.

She described one of her daily routines:

I wrote it [culture] in my daily lesson plans. I used real life experiences and examples from the *Call* paper. I observed scholars' reaction to what I taught. I looked for the glazed-over looks of students. I looked at all my scholars. I had a Hispanic student in my classroom and I was doing a lesson on historical black colleges. She had that glazed-over look. I talked to her and asked her did she know of any Hispanic colleges. She did not know of any, but we worked to create a presentation on the history on Hispanic school or where large number of Hispanics attended school. Her light bulb was turned on. Happy moment—Happy moment!

She recalled how the administration supported the curriculum and the teachers. She explained how relevant the professional development activities were to student achievement. She described a memorable moment at a particular professional development activity. She stated, “We were at a retreat and [the principal] lit a candle. We were at the Elms working in teams. Then she talked about your heart and a feather. I recommitted myself to [Harambee]. I felt inspired.”

I asked her if she could recall a lesson that infused culture and engaged the students in the learning. She said,

I did a lesson on family history. The students created family trees. They were really engaged in the lesson. They actually learned a lot of information about their families. Their behavior was excellent. I was so proud of the level of participation.

She explained how she thought the African-centered curriculum prepared students for state by developing cultural relevance. She had this to say regarding testing:

I hesitate...test taking time, I do not believe in teaching to the test—I really don’t. I do not teach to the test. I like when our kids can show what they know—really know. I like to take a different approach to learning. I like to test kids about their culture. I like kids to share things about their culture, so that I can see what I know. The students created some, “Did you know card facts,” about people from their family and people that they knew—It was fun! The students were engaged—culture and behavior work.

Based on interview comments, she believes that teaching students about their culture supports academic and social achievement.

Imani no longer teaches in the district of my inquiry. She teaches for a neighboring school district. I saw her at a local department store recently, and she affirmed that she still uses some of the techniques she learned while working at Harambee. She proclaimed that teachers at her new school often ask her how she manages her class so

effectively. She explains that it is because of techniques she acquired working at Harambee. In closing she said about Harambee Elementary,

The program was timely, relevant, and appropriate for African American children. I believed it was the answer to the “so called” achievement gap—I was told African Americans could not learn like Whites. Also it [ACE] provides a foundation and a basis for “being.”

Case 5: Ujamaa

I met Ujamaa, a black teacher, at Harambee Elementary School. She was a friendly and extremely likeable person. She was also caring toward the children and staff. She was the speech teacher and she would come to my class to pick students up who needed speech services. We instantly became friends after our first conversation. We both had daughters who were in dance and sons who were around the same age. We had a lot of things in common, and we just seemed to click. She worked at the school for only two years, but we kept in touch. I consider her a close friend. I interviewed Ujamaa at her home; that was the most convenient setting for her because she was taking care of her grandson.

I selected the pseudonym Ujamaa for her because she supported the school and students as often as she could by donating time and money. She always purchased items that the students created during the Kwanzaa market. She consider that to be a small way to support and encourage the students to do their best in school. She also wanted the students to know that she cared. Ujamaa means “to build and maintain our own stores, shops, and businesses and profit from them together.”

Ujamaa’s recollection of events was not as sharp as those of the other participants, possibly because she worked at the school for the shortest period of time, but the activities she remembered were crystal clear. She could recall minor details that were

relevant, but were not mentioned by the other participants. She was excited to share her experiences with me and hoped they would be of relevance to my research inquiry.

Expectations. The first series of questions were about why she worked at the school and describing experiences that supported student achievement. She explained how she started at the school. She said:

Well, I really did not choose the school, this was one of the schools that was assigned to me by the district. The second year, I requested the school because of the school's high expectations. I observed the teachers and students engaging in a lot of activities. Also the students were so well behaved and friendly. The teachers really cared about the students at that school. That is why I stayed another year.

Ujamaa wanted to stress the school's high expectations and structure. She described in detail what she could remember.

The school had very high expectations; therefore I had to be structured. I aligned the students' speech goals to the core curriculum and ACE curriculum. I used a lot of culturally relevant stories and personal experiences to connect and motivate students. The students really seemed to identify with the stories.

She explained some of the strategies she used to support the academic achievement of the students. She explained:

I worked with my students one-on-one and in small groups. I had a personal plan for each student. I also wrote my daily agenda on the board so the students knew what I expected to accomplish that day. The students kept me on task. The school's structure helped the students stay on task. Everybody was held accountable.

We were like a village. Everybody was responsible for student achievement. The cafeteria manager, secretary, and custodians were stakeholders, too. Everybody was responsible.

A survey response supported Ujamaa's reflections. It revealed that strong teacher beliefs affect overall student success:

It begins with a strong belief, team effort, shared goals, commitment and clear expectations where all stakeholders (students, parents, staff, administration, and community) assumes ownership and holds themselves accountable for student success.

Validation. Ujamaa expressed how she used her personal experiences to support academic student achievement. She explained how she validated the students through her lessons. She stated that she shared a lot of her personal experiences with the students. She shared relevant family stories and history with her students and invited them to share relevant events that occurred in their families' history as well.

Harambee Elementary was founded on students' cultural awareness, as documented in the African-centered Education Goals and Guiding Principles. The document describes how the school connects the student to their culture:

The educational goals and guiding principles are derived from ancient and contemporary African-centered cosmological processes that are interconnected in past, present and future orientations that are designed to allow our students to reach their full potential. This Sankofa process will serve as a foundation to rescue, restore and reconstruct the cultural values and historical foundations necessary for our students to be critical thinkers and social producers in a globally diverse competitive world.

I shared the poem, "I Am Somebody" with her and asked her how it made her feels. She described how the poem validated her as a Black person. She expressed that was one of her favorite poems and stated that she could remember the students reciting it during Harambee. She explained how the poem made her feel:

The poems made me feel proud to be an African American, because we have come so far as a people. It also made me feel proud to know I was helping our children learn about their culture and heritage. I loved when the children said the poem. The children felt confident and proud. It also made me feel confident and pride. My self-esteem was raised. It just makes me feel good to know that after all this time we as a people are important.

I asked Ujamaa to select a poem that she felt was relevant to our next interview

She selected the following poem:

Martin Luther King

Author Unknown

We had a lesson one day about Martin Luther King.
And I heard my teacher say of his memory we must sing
Who was he? I asked my teacher.
And she said he was preacher.
Yes she said he led the fight,
to help us gain our civil rights.
Martin never struck another,
His only weapon was his love.
He loved mankind as his brother;
Now he is gone to Heaven above.

I told Ujamaa that was one of my most memorable poems. I asked her why she selected it. She said it was relevant, and all the students in the school knew who Martin Luther King, Jr. was; therefore it reflected the culture of the students. She also stated that she could visualize one of her students reciting the poem during an assembly and how proud that made her feel.

School culture. Ujamaa explained that the school's culture created an environment in which success could occur. She identified the following:

The school-wide culture, ethics and standards were extremely strong. The way the students looked when they walked in the school. Their shirts were tucked, they had on belts and the right shoes. The students and staff were friendly.

She described how she felt about the school administration. She stated:

The administrator was very strong. She created the culture for success and made sure everyone adhered to it. The administrator was very strong. She made sure that learning was going on in all of the classrooms and that the students were safe. She was visible. She cleaned the cafeteria sometimes. I observed her in her nice suit, sweeping the floor and washing tables. That motivated me to do the same thing. She led by example. The students witnessed her picking up trash, so they

picked up trash. I also remember how clean the school was. The custodians really kept the building clean. The principal would not have it any other way.

Another factor she believes contributed to students' academic and social success was the commitment of the staff. She made this statement:

The entire staff was asked by the administration to attend a district board meeting because we needed money for supplies or something at the school. At first, I did not really want to go, but when I got there I saw the majority of the staff was standing together because we needed something for the students. I felt so committed to the school and the students. I was proud to be a member of the staff that evening.

Ujamaa stated that the administration supported a positive culture by honoring the students and staff year-round during Harambee and other programs. She believed honoring students and staff contributed to the success at Harambee. She stated:

The teachers and students were appreciated year around. The morale of the staff was high. The administration always asked if we needed anything for the students or personally. The administration treated us like a family. They did not treat us like we were less than equal. We had thoughts and opinions too. They listened to us. That was important to the school's success. They did not ask us to do anything that they would not do.

A survey response confirmed Ujamaa's statements. The survey revealed that pride played a huge part in the culture of the school. The survey respondent stated, "I was able to assist students in believing in themselves and never giving up! When students have self-determination to succeed and self-pride in themselves there is no limit as to the level of learning they can achieve." The comment suggests that students were able to be successful because they believed in themselves. When students take pride in themselves they take pride in their school, thus creating a culture where students can be successful.

Curriculum and pedagogy. Ujamaa worked with students who had learning disabilities. She had to work harder than most teachers in the beginning to ensure that she was meeting their individual goals and infusing African-centered principles. She recalled the following:

In the beginning it was hard for me to connect African-centered education to speech lessons. I really did not have a clue on how I was going to make it work. So I start adding Ki Swahili words to my lessons with the students. I know it was not much, but when I got the students to pronounce some of those words—now that was challenging

She described how the curriculum and professional development allowed her to add culturally relevant stories to meet the needs of her students. She explained:

Through the curriculum we were able to infuse a lot of African American celebrations. I remember all the Black history plays, dance troop performances, and musicals—all the singing. The students would learn the stuff in class and then perform it on stage.

Ujamaa believed that the retreats were also important to ensure the teachers were able to connect African-centered principles to state standards. She shared one of the many professional development retreats she attended. She recalled a professional development she attended:

I also remember going on a professional development retreat in Tan-Tara. That was one of the best activities that I participated in. I really learned about ACE at that retreat. I had some great times at that school. I miss that school.

A survey respondent acknowledged Ujamaa's statements. The survey explained the importance of professional development to teaching and learning. She described some of the training that was offered:

Focus on instruction on a unified and relevant theme which taught all of us to strive to be the best we could be. The ACE pedagogy was something that became a part of all of our lives, when teaching at school—it was not a method or a strategy from a teacher ed. book, but rather it was a big all-inclusive atmosphere which deeply embedded in all who were a part of it. Part of the driving force in

the ACE pedagogy helped us understand why we and our students were taught by society to believe so many mistruths, and from there were able to build on the strengths that were inherent in our students. ACE was powerful and created a sense of positive ways to make change and gain control for our students and for us as adults too.

Ujamaa is currently employed by the district of my inquiry. She continues to believe in African-centered education. She also would like a school similar to Harambee Elementary to open before her grandson reaches school age. She does not use the principles or practices that she learned during her tenure at Harambee, but believes they could be applied to any student.

Conclusions: Cross-case Analysis

The overarching question for this inquiry was: How did teachers in one African-centered elementary school use culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and positive social behavior? Sub-questions were: (a) How do teachers describe their experiences implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy in an African-centered school environment? (b) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding how culturally relevant best practices influenced academic and social success? (c) What factors do teachers attribute to the success of their students on standardized achievement tests, and (d) What factors do teachers attribute to the students' positive social conduct? Cross-case analysis served as a way to highlight the relevance of the inquiry to the research questions.

The findings of this inquiry pointed out four themes that were consistent throughout all these data, including survey responses, interviews, responses to poetry, school data, and artifacts (see Table 3). School culture, expectations, and curriculum

Table 3

Cross-Case Themes

Participant	Expectations	Validation	School Culture	Curriculum & Pedagogy
Kuumba	x	x	x	x
Kujichagulia	x	x	x	x
Nia	x	x	x	x
Imani	x		x	x
Ujamaa	x	x	x	x

resonated in all data sets. The theme validation resonated in four out of the five cases. The form of data analysis was used to highlight the research question findings.

Expectations Theme

During this inquiry I defined expectations as a strong belief held by staff, students, and the school community that students would succeed academically and socially using a culturally rich curriculum. The staff had high expectations for the students, the students and parents had high expectations for the teachers, and the community had high expectations for the school. Expectations was mentioned or inferred 300 times throughout all data sets. This was a relevant theme that surfaced in every teacher interview. The teachers believed that high expectations were important to student academic and social success at the school.

The teachers focused a lot of time on the theme of expectations. They wanted me to have a clear understanding that the expectations at the school were high and that all stakeholders expected the school to be successful. During every interview the teachers

highlighted what they expected from their students. They expected the students to come to school dressed for success and prepared to learn. They expected CRP through African-centered education to expose students to their culture.

The analysis of this theme provided insight to my overarching question (How did teachers in one African-centered elementary school use culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and positive social behavior) as well as to subquestions b, c and d: (b) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding how culturally relevant best practices influenced academic and social success? (c) What factors do teachers attribute to the success of their students on standardized achievement tests?, and (d) What factors do teachers attribute to the students' positive social conduct?

There were several similarities across all participants' responses. All participants believed and expected the students to achieve academically and socially. They all mentioned that achievement and being successful was a school expectation. They mentioned that the teachers believed in the school and that the school was respected in the community. They emphasized their commitment to the students, school, and the curriculum. They all had experiences in urban education prior to working at the inquiry school, but they connected to the inquiry school because of its culturally relevant curriculum based on African-centered methods. The participants could identify with the curriculum because of personal experiences that they had had. They also believed that the students were successful academically and socially because of the school's African-centered approach to educating students.

Throughout the analysis of theme, the teachers mentioned that using the celebrations and rituals such as Harambee, Code of Ma'at, and the Nguzo Saba held students accountable and responsible for how well they behaved in school. The participants mentioned using celebrations to make students feel good about themselves. Positive discipline strategies were the keys to student social success. The Code of Ma'at and the Nguzo Saba, used during Harambee and throughout the year, also helped students academically, as mentioned by three participants. The teachers mentioned that the principles of the Nguzo Saba reflected the expectations the school had for the students. The teachers used the Code of Ma'at as a way of life, as noted by one participant.

Students recited the Code of Ma'at every morning and discussed a principle of the Nguzo Saba every morning during classroom Harambee. The teachers mentioned that these practices helped student achievement and discipline. Two teachers noted that using the strategy at the beginning of the day set the pace and tone of the day. During Harambee, the class recited poems, meditated, honored students, and sometimes danced. This cultural practice resonated with the students and teachers. The teachers allowed the students to share personal reflections, select their own music, and sing during the Harambee celebration. The participants' responses reflected a belief that culturally relevant activities promoted students' academic and social achievement.

Validation Theme

Throughout this inquiry, the theme validation was an important factor in student achievement. I defined validation for the inquiry as the awareness that the work the teachers, students, administration, and school were doing was of value to all people, but more specifically, to Black people. There were 150 references to the theme validation

throughout these data sets. The analysis for this theme provided answers to the overarching question (How did teachers in one African-centered elementary school use culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and positive social behavior?) and subquestions a, b, and c: (a) How do teachers describe their experiences implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy in an African-centered school environment? (b) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding how culturally relevant best practices influenced academic and social success? and (c) What factors do teachers attribute to the success of their students on standardized achievement tests?

The similarities in the participants' responses collected from these data were that all five participants thought that students' self-identity contributed to their academic and social success. All participants believed that it was important for students to see themselves in the curriculum to be successful in life. Four of five participants referenced that they connected their personal self to the students, and that contributed to the students' self-esteem. Most of the participants, four out of five, shared personal experiences that connected African-centered education in their personal lives. They believed in the concepts that the curriculum offered. They felt that the students were successful because the school felt connected.

The efficacy the teachers established with the students was a big focus of their responses. The teachers treated students with respect. The administration treated the teachers with respect. The teachers worked as a team looking at student data, planning collaboratively, and experiencing student social and academic success collectively. The

students' and teachers' hard work validated African-centered methods and contributed to the climate and culture of the school.

School Culture Theme

In this theme I defined school culture as the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, and attitudes that influenced the school's overall environment. School culture was referenced 401 times during the data analysis. The analysis of this theme provided a response to the overarching question of this inquiry (How did teachers in one African-centered elementary school use culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and positive social behavior?) and subquestions b and c: (b) What are the perceptions of teachers regarding how culturally relevant best practices influenced academic and social success? and (c) What factors do teachers attribute to the success of their students on standardized achievement tests?

The consistencies in these data in the area of school culture were that all participants emphasized the significance of the school's positive discipline policies, such as Harambee, that contributed to the culture. They all believed that promoting positive student behavior was more effective than negative consequences. They also believed that honoring students weekly for their academic and social achievement was of great importance to the climate of the school. Furthermore, they believed that the positive discipline policies contributed to student-teacher relationships. The participants stated that celebrating students' successes was important to students' effort. They mentioned that students being honored during Harambee took pride in themselves.

They referenced several times how well behaved the students were at the school. They attributed the positive behavior to the administrator. They believed the administrator was fair with the staff and students. They stated the principal was consistent and applied the principles of the Nguzo Saba to students fairly. It was mentioned by three participants that she modeled positive behaviors for the students and staff. The teachers felt that her positive disposition contributed to the school's culture.

Another important factor in the school culture that was mentioned by all participants was the celebrations. The participants stated that the celebrations were student-centered and well organized. The activities were fun and always showcased what the students had been learning in class. The participants mentioned that the programs were important because students were able to invite their parents and the community.

The friendly, inviting school environment, positive discipline policy, school celebrations, administration, student-to-teacher, student-to-student, and teacher-to-teacher relationships were mentioned many times as to why the school was successful. The curriculum, pedagogy, and methodology were other important factors that the participants felt were of significance.

Curriculum and Pedagogy Theme

Throughout these data, including all interviews, the theme curriculum, pedagogy, and methodology emerged as a foundational component to CRP through African-centered methods. I defined this theme as the “what” and “how” being taught to the students in the classrooms and throughout the school. As I began this journey I thought the curriculum was important in the classroom, but I wanted to understand how the African-centered methodology played a role in the pedagogy. These data revealed that the participants used

the state-mandated curriculum but infused the African curriculum in every subject, including the arts. This curriculum theme was referenced 50 times throughout these data. The cross-case analysis of this theme answered subquestion c: What factors do teachers attribute to the success of their students on standardized achievement tests?

The teachers stated the curriculum was one of the tools used to meet AYP and meet the students' cultural needs. They stated the ACE curriculum was fluid and allowed teachers to adjust and bring in additional resources to meet the needs of students. The teachers were able to find culturally relevant resource books, use personal experiences of the teachers and students, and also consult the community as a means to connect the curriculum to the student.

The teachers also stated that they enjoyed and gained a lot of information from the professional development activities. Kujichagulia and Ujamaa understood how important the professional retreats were to the effective implementation of an African-centered curriculum. The participants also stated the retreats were fun and rejuvenating. They both used the retreats to connect with staff, collaborate, and share the learned knowledge in their classrooms. The retreats were always student-centered and culturally relevant. The retreats were important because they created a sense of family and allowed the teachers time to reflect and evaluate the pedagogical strategies.

The teachers used pedagogical strategies that were considered most appropriate for African-centered education, such as questioning, inferring, and visualization. The teachers used these strategies to help the students take pride in themselves, build confidence, and to think critically. The teachers used a variety of strategies to build their

self-esteem, because they believed this practice supported high levels of student achievement at the school.

Another culturally relevant strategy the teachers used was presentation. The teachers understood how important it was to allow the student an opportunity to present what they had learned. The presentations were given by students during celebrations, programs, parent meetings, and in the classrooms. Throughout the theme, the teachers connected the presentations to the student's retention of knowledge, which in turn contributed to high levels of academic and social achievement.

Summary

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological case study was to understand teachers' insights of CRP through African-centered methods, to identify strategies, and describe best classroom practices that led to school outcomes that included meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) and improved student conduct. The unit of analysis included findings of the CRP experiences through African-centered methods of five elementary teachers who worked with students at one Midwestern urban school. I discovered through this research inquiry, data analysis, and coding process how similar the five teachers' beliefs were, and how favorably they felt about the school and African-centered education.

Chapter 5 provides recommendations and suggestions for continued research in CRP through ACE.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this heuristic phenomenological case study was to understand teachers' insights of CRP through African-centered methods, to identify strategies, and to describe best classroom practices that led to school outcomes that included meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) and improved student conduct. The unit of analysis included findings of the CRP experiences through African-centered methods of five elementary teachers who worked with students at one Midwestern urban school. The unit of analysis in conjunction with the surveys and research questions provided the structure for the research findings.

The beliefs, experiences, and recollections shared by the five participants of this inquiry were used to answer the following overarching inquiry question, as well as the subquestions: How did teachers in one African-centered elementary school use culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and positive social behavior? How do teachers describe their experiences implementing a culturally responsive pedagogy in an African-centered school environment? What are the perceptions of teachers regarding how culturally relevant best practices influenced academic and social success? What factors do teachers attribute to the success of their students on standardized achievement tests? and What factors do teachers attribute to the students' positive social conduct?

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the three prevailing findings of all data sources that infer CRP through African-centered methods is an effective reform model that inspires high levels of student achievement for Black students. These findings have

implications to support CRP through African-centered methods as an approach to eliminate traditional outdated curriculum models for a more diverse inclusive one. Next, I discuss the implications of three of the themes revealed in all data sources to the field of education. I provide recommendations for school leaders and educators who may be considering a reform model that offers high levels of student achievement for students of color, but more specifically the Black learner. I provide a final reflection to express my personal thoughts and feelings in relation to my experiences with CRP through African-centered education.

Overview of CRP through African-centered Methods

Throughout this dissertation I have used African-centered methodology as described at one urban elementary school to define and inform CRP through African-centered education. I noted several ideas that validated some of my prior thoughts regarding African-centered education as data in this research inquiry unfolded. In this segment of my inquiry, I illustrate how African-centered education in one urban school offered instruction that produced high levels of academic and social achievement. Furthermore, I explain how this model can be implemented to produce similar results in other urban schools with large Black student populations.

After analyzing and coding all data, I created a blueprint for developing and sustaining a successful public African-centered school (see Appendix G). The blueprint should be helpful to individuals and organizations who are interested in creating and/or sustaining an effective African-centered school. The purpose of the blueprint is to provide individual schools and/or districts the necessary steps that should be taken to support a viable African-centered school model that commands high levels of academic

and social achievement. Included in the blueprint were sample interview questions to select the best candidates for teaching at an African-centered school (see Appendix H). The African-centered blueprint is student-centered and if implemented with fidelity, it will increase student achievement for many Black learners and can be adapted to meet the needs of other students of color.

Expectations

During this inquiry I defined expectations as a strong belief held by staff, students, and the school community that students would succeed academically and socially using a culturally relevant curriculum. All data, including documents and surveys, emphasized high expectations for all stakeholders. This is one of the components of African-centered education that cannot be overlooked. The teachers and staff must believe in the students they teach. This is nonnegotiable for an African-centered teacher. The teachers' beliefs are informed by their knowledge and personal experiences as learners and teachers (Borko & Putnam, 1996). According to Clarke and Peterson (1986), teachers' beliefs are tied to their philosophical underpinnings. If teachers believe African American students can't learn, that will influence how they teach and what they expect from their students.

Effective teachers of African-centered methodology have strong beliefs that create high expectations for all students, academically and socially. According to Sleeter and Cornbleth (2011), the more teachers expect from students, the more they receive from students. They stated, "When we expect more from students and act in a way that helps them meet our expectations, they accomplish more" (p. 6). Delivering a message of high expectations was present in all participant interviews. The teachers believed the

students could succeed in school, held high expectations, and modeled and supported a culture of excellence. In turn, the students achieved academically and socially (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

In the African-centered model I created, expectations were one of the guiding principles for establishing a school that is academically and socially successful. Kujichagulia, Imani and Nia spoke passionately about what they believed and expected from students. They also shared the academic and social results they received from their students by letting the students know they believed in them and expected them to achieve and behave in a certain manner. They held the students accountable by expecting more from them. Three out of the five participants made reference to their commitment to the school. Kujichagulia stayed after school and worked on Saturdays, Kuumba played a large role in almost all school programs and celebrations, and Nia worked on character development with the students after school.

Validation

The theme of validation was present in four of the five participant interviews and throughout the other data sources. For this study, the theme was defined as the awareness that the work the teachers, students, administration, and school were doing was of value to all people, but more specifically, to African American people. The important points of this theme resonated through the teachers' personal experiences that reflected how they saw themselves in the curriculum, how connected the curriculum was to the identity of the student, and how the school was perceived and valued in the community.

Personal validation, though an important theme, did not emerge in all the interviews. Imani wanted the students to be validated for their work and efforts of their

history, but she did not need to be personally validated. Kujichagulia, Nia, Kuumba, and Ujamaa experienced personal validation through the curriculum that created personal validation, which informed the way they interacted with students, staff, and the community. Ladson-Billings (1994) affirms that CRP teachers inspire students through their experiences and expect students to share what they have learned with others. Each participant had a life experience to share that led them to the school. They wanted other people to respect the methods they were using to educate children.

All five participants used cultural awareness and self-identity to motivate students and inform instruction. The teachers believed if the students felt valued about who they were as a people, they would want to live up to their expectations. The teachers used cultural stories, cultural celebrations, and other cultural activities to connect the students to learning. The students felt good and could identify with the ideas the teachers were sharing. They believed that this form of validation influenced and motivated the students to do better and be better.

School Culture

School culture was prevalent throughout the interviews, surveys, and school-related documents. This theme was defined as the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, and attitudes that influenced every aspect of the school. All five participants noted that they were proud of the students and the school. It was also evident throughout all other data sources. All five participants in this inquiry contributed to the school's culture by modeling positive behaviors, having strong beliefs about student achievement, and expecting more from the school. According to Gay (2000), the culture of the school is shaped by its traditions, rituals, and shared beliefs.

The mission and vision statement of the school manifests in the school's traditions and celebrations. The five teachers in this inquiry believed in the school and supported celebrations such as Harambee to create a positive school culture. They believed that the school was a great place to work and a great place for students to learn. Kujichagulia and Nia believed so deeply in the school that their children attended the school. They wanted their children to learn about their culture while attaining a quality education. Gay (2000) emphasizes, "Good teaching transcends place, people, time and context" (p. 22). Each teacher was dedicated to the school and the students' success.

Throughout our interviews, the teachers talked about how the school, celebrations, and programs contributed to the school's culture. The school had a lot of programs that reinforced the curriculum and culture. All participants mentioned Harambee, which was a celebration that honored students' academic and social success. Kujichagulia, Nia, and Ujamaa modeled appropriate behaviors during Harambee. They recited poetry, sang songs, and danced. They motivated the students to participate in the celebration. The teachers attributed the students' social behavior to celebrations such as Harambee and also to the school administration.

During the interviews, four of the five participants made reference to the administrator's influence on the culture of the school. The teachers believed in the administrator and her abilities to lead the school in the direction it needed to go. They noted that she was fair in the way she enforced the student discipline policy and the way she listened and supported teachers. Kujichagulia, Nia, and Ujamaa viewed her as a model and a part of their extended family. They each had a personal story that demonstrated her commitment to the teachers and to the school. Jones (2009) states, "The

developing and maintenance of the positive relationships with staff is a critical component of developing and nurturing positivisms in cultures in schools” (p. 2).

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Curriculum was prevalent throughout these data. All participants referred to the curriculum at some point during the interviews. I defined curriculum as the “what” and “how” being taught in the classroom. Ladson-Billings (1994) states, “Students’ real life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the “official curriculum” (p. 117). The teachers at the school were required to use the state adopted curriculum; however, in addition, they infused the school’s African-centered curriculum into every subject. Ujamaa and Imani stated how challenging this was to do in the beginning. They had to collaborate with peers, attend professional development, and study on their own to make a significant impact on student achievement. Once they were able to connect the two curriculums, relevant learning occurred.

Professional development was essential to ensure that the student was always the center of lessons. Khepera (2007) and Hilliard (2000) uphold the importance of professional development opportunities to allow teachers to dive deeper and grasp a clearer understanding of the curriculum. The teachers in this inquiry worked collaboratively during the professional development sessions with administration. They contributed a significant amount of input as to what was in the curriculum. The teachers presented lessons that focused on African and African American people; they created classroom libraries that reflected the culture of the students they were teaching; and they used personal experiences to reinforce the curriculum.

Kuumba and Ujamaa also talked about how relevant, motivating, relaxing, and inspiring the retreats were. They talked about how much information they gained from the African-centered scholars who presented at the retreats. Nia and Kuumba shared how rejuvenated and committed they felt at the end of the retreat. They stated that they felt like a family. They wanted to share the knowledge they gained with their students. Some of the parents and community attend the retreats to share their perspectives concerning the curriculum.

The participants' pedagogy style resonated throughout all five cases and was important to student achievement. The teachers discussed how the African-centered curriculum allowed differentiated instruction to support student achievement. Kujichagulia and Nia pointed out the curriculum required the students to work in groups. Also, the curriculum emphasized the importance of group work and communication in African-centered education. They knew how important it was for students to be able to communicate with each other and with the teacher. According to Gay (2000), the way the teacher communicates and shares ideas with the student, and the way the student is able to understand and communicate back to the teacher plays a big role in student achievement for students of color.

Each teacher ensured they were meeting the needs of their students by infusing the African-centered curriculum with fidelity. They did this by using all the strategies and methods they learned in professional development to support high levels of student achievement. They were immersed in the culture and language of the students and were proud of it. Ujamaa and Nia used the students' communication style as a learning tool when creating tests, presenting new knowledge, or reading stories. They knew the

information would become more relevant for the students because it was congruent with their own experiences. This also helped with student retention. When students feel that they are a relevant part of the curriculum, they become more engaged and vested (Gay, 2000).

CRP through African-centered education was a reform model that was sometimes seen as controversial, but was successful in educating students at one Midwestern school. All five participants in my research inquiry achieved some level of success educating students using CRP through African-centered methods. The participants also revealed that teaching at the school could be complicated, politically charged, and personally challenging at times, but they would not have traded the experience for anything. Many of the former staff still consider themselves ACE teachers.

Recommendations for School Leaders and Educators

I would like to offer several recommendations to individual schools, districts, and state organizations that want to improve the academic and social achievement of Black students. These recommendations can be used to create and sustain high achieving, culturally relevant African-centered schools. I have entitled my recommendations the “Three Cs”: Culture, Collaboration and Common Sense. The recommendations are meant to support high levels of achievement for Black students through culture, explain why collaboration is more effective than division, and how using common sense will make all conversations student-centered.

The Three Cs: Culture, Collaboration and Common Sense

Culture. It is important that educators (a) understand the student’s home culture and (b) create and sustain the student’s school culture. I recommend that educators

become familiar with the influence that the student's home culture has on student achievement. Understanding where students come from is critical in guiding them academically and socially. Many educators who work in the urban core of cities do not live in the community where they teach. They travel back and forth to work, never really seeing the community where the students live. I am not recommending that teachers relocate, but I am recommending that teachers visit a grocery store, a church, a barbershop, or a beauty shop after work to gain a clearer understanding of where their students live.

The school leadership could organize a field activity or individual teachers could travel together. The school could charter a bus after school or on a Saturday and take staff around the school's boundaries. I recommend that teachers take notes, pictures, and/or videos so they can reflect later on what they see. I also recommend that the teachers share their experiences with their students. This activity will connect the teacher to the student, create a sense of empathy, and make the student's home culture more relevant to the teacher. Developing a sense of empathy will provide a basic understanding for teachers and help them create relevant lessons that will support high levels of student achievement.

The second recommendation is that schools create and sustain positive school cultures in which students feel safe, validated, and motivated. I recommend that schools create clear, fair, and consistent vision and mission statements that are student-centered. There should also be a student friendly code of conduct book that has fair, appropriate forms of redirections for students who do not follow school rules. All stakeholders, particularly students, must work collaboratively to create and enforce the school's

policies and expectations. Another recommendation is to create a school culture that honors and celebrates students' social and academic achievements. This can be accomplished through programs, celebrations, and parent meetings that honor students for their hard work and achievements. The students must have a role in all decisions that affect them academically and socially.

Creating student leadership opportunities is an important part of school culture. Students must see themselves as leaders in the school. This will allow them to become accountable for what is going on inside and outside the school. Students must have a sense of belonging regarding their education academically and socially. Student leaders will reinforce the mission and vision of the school because they will have had a role in its creation. They will become advocates of the school. Creating a positive school culture is essential for a school to develop and sustain success over time. Allow students leaders to help you in that journey.

Collaboration. My next recommendation to districts is to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure student learning is at the forefront of all decisions. Collaborating means to work as a team to guarantee that students receive the best educational experiences allowable by law. When people collaborate, they set all personal differences aside because they are working for the greater good for all, not some. Individuals have to set aside titles and positions to confirm that every voice is heard. They have to be willing to place personal agendas behind to create new agendas that reflect the contributions of all stakeholders.

Collaborating is not for the weak or meek of heart. Organizations have to be willing to become vulnerable to become stronger. For cooperation to be effective,

districts have to be willing to agree with people they normally disagree with. Leadership teams have to use a different lens (e.g., through the lens of the students or the parents); a lens they may not be comfortable using. Teams have to keep the bigger picture in mind at all times—students’ academic and social achievement.

Districts and leadership teams must be role models for the students and the communities they represent. The students and parents have to be a part of the equation. They have to be a part of the collaboration in more than a symbolic role. For example, it is not appropriate to conduct a meeting on an evening that is not convenient for parents, because very few will attend. Districts have to be creative to guarantee that students and parents are part of the collaboration. They may have to have a concert with a local artist to get students to attend so that they can have a voice on issues that are relevant to them. To get parents out for collaboration purposes, districts may need to have a free comedy show, a gospel event, or an event that showcases the students. Whenever I needed to get a large parent turnout, I put on a production starring the students. It always worked!

The district of my inquiry and the school leadership that I worked for did not communicate effectively. In my opinion, neither entity was willing to make any sacrifices for the sake of the students, the parents, or the school community. Both organizations used power and control to get what they wanted. Neither group was willing to see through the lens of the other. They were both sidetracked by obtaining personal victories. They were unable to see the students for their egos. Ultimately the team with the most power won the prize—resulting in displaced students, a dysfunctional school, and a community wondering who’s teaching the children.

Common Sense. In my more than 17 years of educational experience as a teacher and a principal, I discovered that many school district leaders lack common sense. I am not implying that they lack intellectual knowledge, sense, or abilities. I am proposing that they lack reasonable judgment based on personal bias. I believe that often school leaders make decisions based on personal beliefs and experience that may or may not be relevant to the student populations they are designated to serve. I am defining common sense as the simple ability to recognize, comprehend, or judge events or situations by values that are shared by most logical people.

I have often wonder how conclusions are derived regarding urban student learning, more specifically Black students. Do districts believe that all students learn at the same rate and at the same time? Do they believe that all students who live in the urban core are unable to learn? Do they believe that parents of these children, don't want or expect the best for them? Or do they believe that they know best because they were selected or elected to know? I posit these are common sense issues. The average person knows that children learn differently. If the average person knows this, why do districts continue to buy one-size-fits-all programs to improve student achievement?

Do districts and states do research on how many Black students learn best? Do they really care? I often hear the phrase “we are doing everything we can do, but the students are not learning.” Another common sense moment—apparently if people were doing everything they could do, the students would be learning. Doing everything a person could possibly do, includes thinking outside the box and looking at reform models that have been successful in educating students of color.

Based on my research findings, urban districts that have a large Black student population should place a strong emphasis on CRP through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement. A district that uses common sense would attempt to find out what and how schools that use culturally relevant pedagogy are doing.

An African-centered or culturally relevant curriculum in isolation will not produce high levels of academic or social student achievement. I know this is common sense to some but not to all district officials—curriculum alone does not create student success. My inquiry results suggest that teacher beliefs, school culture, professional development, high expectations, and leadership intertwined with the curriculum create a high functioning African-centered and relevant school. The last common sense moment I would like to highlight is that schools are for the benefit of children, not for the convenience or comfort of adults. The environment and tools used by education professionals should be determined by what is best for student social and academic achievement.

Suggestions for Future Research

This inquiry analyzed the perceptions and insights of five teachers who implemented CRP through African-centered methods, to identify strategies, and describe best classroom practices that led to school outcomes that included meeting adequate yearly progress (AYP) and improved student conduct. Suggestions to further the research for this inquiry are to interview different participants at the same school, use a different researcher, and/or select a different school setting.

To broaden this study, I suggest that additional research be conducted with teachers from various grade levels and ethnic backgrounds and other staff members from

African-centered schools throughout the United States. Also, the research could be completed in a middle or high school. Initially, my goal was to interview a variety of staff members, but I was unable to contact most non-certified staff members. I believe that non-certified staff could provide an authentic lens because every person in the school setting plays a role in student achievement. Non-certified staff at Harambee Elementary worked with students indirectly on a daily basis. They participated in all professional development activities and knew what the students were expected to learn. I think their experiences would provide a different perspective and authentic lens. Their experiences would allow the researcher to illustrate a complete picture of the students' academic and social learning environment and contribute greatly to the study.

Furthermore, I recommend that students and parents be interviewed. Adding the voices of students and parents to this research inquiry would get to core of why students were successful. The parent component would shed light on why parents selected the school and how it affected their children socially and academically.

Additionally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to understand how African-centered pedagogy has influenced students' lives after high school – students' identities, sense of having a voice, self-advocacy. The research inquiry would investigate the following: Did they go to college? If they did, what were their retention and graduation rates? What were their post-degree professional / career placements? Each one of the graduates would be considered a case study with multiple stories to be told.

My closing submission for further research is to compare the research findings from this research inquiry to other schools within the district that have similar levels of academic and social successes. The inquiry could progress into an array of best practices

that support high levels of academic and social achievement for students of color living in the urban core of most U.S. cities. Furthermore, the inquiry may contribute educational strategies to the current reform models for schools and districts that desire to close the gaps in achievement between students of color and their White counterparts.

Concluding Reflections

I started my dissertation journey four years ago with the goal of understanding how one Midwestern school that implemented CRP through African-centered methods was successful in educating students socially and academically. I had no indication that it was going to be such an emotional journey, both personally and professionally. There were many emotions that surfaced during some of the interviews. The intensity of the emotions were sometimes overwhelming” for me as the researcher, because I was personally invested in the outcome. It was acceptable to have strong emotions because this was a heuristic inquiry, but first and foremost this was an academic inquiry, therefore I had to keep my emotions in check. I stayed focused on my purpose and research goals. I did not allow my personal views to influence the inquiry. I documented only what was revealed by the participants. .As my inquiry evolved, many things occurred. Let me explain by sharing a personal story.

My story began in 1996 when I was hired to teacher at the only African-centered school in the Midwestern district of my inquiry. I was fresh out of college and had no teaching experience. I was interviewed by the school’s principal. I literally fell in love with her from the moment I saw her. I loved her African attire, her hairstyle, her jewelry, and the way she carried herself. My first impression was a lasting impression. I had to work at this school, no matter what. She was a tough interviewer; she asked lots of

questions, but she never looked up at me. I just knew I was not going to get the job. I had to think quickly. I looked around her office and noticed several elephants. Before she could ask me another question, I asked her whether she was in a particular sorority. She looked up at me and said, “Yes, I am.” I said. “Me, too.” At that moment the ice was broken. I am not sure if that affiliation helped me get the job, but I know it did not hurt.

After being hired, I never looked back. I loved African-centered education. The school was an effective model that supported high levels of academic and social achievement, infused culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods, and was committed to improving the educational landscape for children of color, specifically Black children. The school had been in the community for only three years when I was hired. The school had a strong, progressive, effective, and sometimes opinionated leader, who always put the students’ needs first.

In mid-2000s, the school leadership worked collaboratively with students, parents, and the community to relocate and reconfigure to a larger facility that would serve students in grades K-9. The school would still be a part of the Midwestern district but function as a contract school in partnership with the Midwestern district. The school would continue the trajectory it was founded on: using African-centered best practices to reframe the academic and social outcome for its students. The school was not aware of how challenging it would be to maintain high levels of student achievement, while maintaining the day-to-day operations of a contract school. The school had limited resources and was unable to afford the necessities that were available to most schools in the district.

The school was unable to retain many of its hand selected, highly qualified and trained staff members, due to a new retirement system. The school's board needed to negotiate a new contract with the Midwestern district. In the meantime, parents of students who attended the contract school forged a lawsuit against the district, claiming the district was not providing adequate funds for the children who attended the contract school. After the lawsuit was filed, the entire process became very personal and adult-centered.

To make a long story short, the ACE contract school and the Midwestern district were unable to reach an agreement. The district of my inquiry decided they would take over the ACE program, rename it, and pretend that they created it. The school district would give no credit to the school leaders, community activists, staff, parents, or students who developed the school and made it a viable reform model for more than 20 years.

To make matters worse, all of the above-mentioned events were taking place during the second year of my doctoral program. My husband and I both lost our positions (we both worked for the African-centered schools), and my husband was diagnosed with cancer. I had a lot of support from my family, dissertation chair, and one of my dissertation committee members. I could not have finished this journey without their guidance.

Additionally, I kept my life's work and mission in perspective. I had to remember why I went into education in the first place. I entered into the realm of education because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of all children, but more specifically, Black children. I wanted children of color to experience a quality education in a safe public school environment. I needed children of color to be successful because they were a

reflection of me. I also experienced success working at the African-centered school of my inquiry.

I was also able to stay focused by visualizing the faces of all the Black children with whom I had established and sustained personal relationships. I used CRP through African-centered methods with fidelity for 15 years of my career, and I can attest to its effect on student achievement and social behaviors. Another motivation for continuing this inquiry was to open the minds of naysayers who did not believe CRP through African-centered education was a legitimate reform model.

This phenomenon of five teachers from different backgrounds having similar experiences resonated with me. They instilled in me, through their beliefs and experiences, that I must continue to challenge the status quo educational system and fight for students of color; specifically, Black students in the district of my inquiry and throughout the United States. The struggle to a more diverse, culturally relevant school curriculum, which supports high levels of academic and social achievement, continues.

My leadership credo for school reform and reason for completing this dissertation was to tell the story of African-centered education in one school, in one Midwestern district, in one Midwestern city. I hope this dissertation informs school leaders, district administrators, and state officials to consider the following:

Leadership Credo

1. Always make decisions regarding students about the students, not the disagreements of adults.
2. Be a role model for the students and work collaboratively to ensure that students' academic and social needs are met.

3. Remember that schools were built for children, not for the convenience of adults.
4. Replace personal agendas, attitudes, and ambitions with the goal of improving student achievement.
5. Use position of power or authority to compromise with people who have different ideas or opinions than to support high levels of academic and student achievement.
6. Create rather than destroy.
7. Ensure that reality is truth.
8. Accept and support reform models that sustain high levels of academic and social achievement, even if a district or organization did not create it and/or understand it.

My aforementioned credo has helped me in my current placement as an instructional coach in a non-African-centered school environment. The student demographics are similar to the school of my inquiry, but the student academic and social reality is not. Academic achievement is low, and suspension rates are high. I wonder if student achievement improve if the school implemented some of the activities that my research revealed promoted high levels of academic and social achievement. Activities such as Harambee, weekly student recognitions, monthly celebrations, and other undertakings were important at the school of my inquiry. Would the components be important at my current placement? Would teachers support a new approach to educating children? Would the activities change the culture and climate at the school? Could student academic and social achievement improve?

I provided CRP professional development to the staff at my current placement, and they desired more. The staff really wanted to increase student achievement. The teachers were buying into a new way of teaching. Teacher buy-in is a critical component in implementing new initiatives. The teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement, because they are with them the majority of the time. Making gradual changes with the staff, instead of implementing everything at once is important, and allowing them to be a part of the process is very important.

Harambee Elementary implemented CRP through ACE gradually over time. The staff bought into the theme because they experienced high levels of academic and social achievement very early. A different approach to education changed the landscape at Harambee Elementary. Can it change the scenery for other educational institutions? Or are teachers and principals so disenfranchised (working within the hegemonic system), it's hard to change the mindset to anything besides trying to survive at school.

APPENDIX A

REQUEST FOR EMAIL ADDRESSES

Greetings of Hotep (peace) former ACE Staff Member!

I am conducting a research study on *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy Through African-Centered Methods in a Midwestern Urban Elementary School*. The elementary school is Harambee Elementary. The goal of this study is to understand how teachers and other staff members from Harambee used culturally responsive pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and social success for their students while working in the urban core within a district identified as failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

As a former employee of the school, I need you to help me get the word out to as many former teachers and staff members as possible. I need their email addresses, so that I can send them an informational letter, informed consent letter and survey describing the research in more detail. If you can support me or know of others that may be able to assist, please send me their name and email addresses as soon as possible. You are also welcome to complete the survey. If you have questions or need to contact me for any reason, you may reach my cell phone at 816 217-0991 or send an email **jdctz3@mail.umkc.edu**.

Asante Sana for your assistance,

Jimmie Bullard

APPENDIX B

WRITTEN ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS

CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY THROUGH AN AFRICAN-CENTERED
APPROACH IN A MIDWESTERN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Principal Investigator:

Jimmie Bullard

Written Online Survey Questions

Please complete the following survey questions with as many details as you are comfortable sharing. If you have any questions, please contact the principal investigator: Jimmie Bullard, Doctoral Student, Primary Investigator of University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC). Cell phone: (816) 217-0991 or jdctz3@umkc.edu

Every effort will be made to keep this information completely confidential. Individuals from the University of Missouri Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Program, and federal regulatory agencies may look at records as a means of quality control.

- When were you employed at the inquiry school (please share the beginning and ending dates for your employment)?

- What was your position? (If you were a **teacher**, what grade level(s) did you teach? If you were **not a teacher**, what grade level(s) did you work with?)

- Did any of your own children attend the inquiry school? If you answered yes, explain why you selected the school.

- Describe one of your personal experiences related to culturally responsive pedagogy in an African-centered school environment.

- What culturally responsive best practices did you use to achieve academic success with the students? (Success is defined as meeting state achievement standards as measured on state achievement tests in Communication Arts and Mathematics)

- What are some factors within the inquiry school that you attribute to students' success on standardized achievement tests?

- What are some factors within the inquiry school that you attribute to students' positive social conduct? (Positive social conduct is the appropriate behavior that your students exhibited based on school policies.)

- Would you be willing to participate in two (2), 60-minute individual interviews for this research inquiry focusing on your experiences related to culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered methods?

Yes No Depends on availability Need more information

- How would you rate your interest in the phenomenon of African-centered education and why?

Extremely Interested Interested Somewhat interested Not Interested

- How comfortable would you be disclosing personal experiences related to African-centered education?

_____ Very Comfortable _____ Comfortable _____ Not comfortable

- How committed would you be to this research inquiry and why?

_____ Very committed _____ Not committed _____ Depends on my availability

- Please check all that apply that are relevant to your experiences with African-centered education:

_____ I have only worked at the inquiry school

_____ I have worked at other schools prior to working at the inquiry school

_____ I have worked at other schools after working at the inquiry school

_____ I wanted to work at the inquiry school

_____ I worked at the inquiry school because no other schools had openings

_____ I would have continued to work at the inquiry school if it were still in existence

_____ I had experience with African-centered methods before working at the school

_____ I had experience with African-centered methods after working at the school

Please share any additional information that you feel is relevant to this research inquiry:

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Former African-centered Staff Member,

I am writing you to let you know about a research study that you have the option to take part in. Jimmie Bullard, UMKC doctoral student, is conducting the research study. I am contacting you because you are a former employee at the school that will be studied. The survey should only take about 15 minutes to complete.

Research studies are done to answer a question. The question we are asking for this study is: How did teachers and other staff members in one African-centered elementary school use culturally responsive pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and social success for their students while working in the urban core within a district identified as failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?

The reason we want to know more about culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered education is to improve public education for students that live in the urban core of cities throughout the United States.

Taking part in this research survey is optional. We are looking for people who want to take part in this research study and who were:

- employed at the school equal to or greater than three years,
- utilized CRP through ACE, and worked at the school between 2000 and 2006.

If you decided to take part in the survey, I would:

- Ask you to read and answer the survey questions to the best of your ability
- Return survey electronically within in one week of receiving it

Costs

There is no cost to participate in the study.

Payments

You will receive no payment for completing this survey.

The survey is included with this email. Please complete and return the survey if you are interested in taken part in the study. If you need more information before completing the survey, please contact Jimmie Bullard, study coordinator.

If you are selected to participate in the study, you will be contacted within one week of receiving your completed survey. Please do not hesitate to call us if you have any

questions as you read over this material. You may reach me at 816 217-0991. I am happy to review any of this with you and answer any questions you may have.

Taking part in survey is voluntary. You may choose not to take part. If you decide not to take part in this survey, your decision will have no effect on you.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jimmie Bullard, Study Coordinator

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY WITHOUT SIGNATURES FOR SURVEY

Consent for Participation in a Research Inquiry CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY THROUGH AN AFRICAN-CENTERED APPROACH IN A MIDWESTERN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Introduction

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study in Kansas City, Missouri. The researcher in charge of this study is Dr. Jennifer Friend. While she will run this study, other qualified persons who work with her may act for her. The study coordinator will be Jimmie Bullard, Doctoral Candidate-University of Missouri, Kansas City.

The research team is conducting this survey to screen for potential candidates to be interviewed for the research study. The survey is attached to his email. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. Please complete the entire survey and email it back to Jimmie Bullard (jdctz3@mail.umkc.edu) within one week of receipt. This form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and beliefs, if any, if you consent to be in the study.

Background

This research inquiry, *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy through an African-centered Approach in a Midwestern Urban Elementary School*, is a quality inquiry proposed to examine data related to student achievement, specifically students that were taught using African-centered methods.

Purpose:

The purpose of this survey is to identify five potential candidates to take part in the interview portion of this research study.

The findings will be shared through a research dissertation presented to the doctoral committee on behalf of the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC).

Study Procedures

If you agree to take part in this survey, you will complete the survey in its entirety and email it to Jimmie Bullard within one week.

Possible risks or Side effects of Taking Part in this Study

There are psychological, emotional, social risks, and risk of loss of confidentiality involved with this study because you will be asked to recall personal experiences that may or may not be positive.

Possible Benefits for Taking Part in this Study

There are no direct benefits. The indirect benefit to society is that the personal experiences of the subjects could change urban education and increase student achievement in urban cities in the United States.

Fees and Expenses

There is no monetary cost to participate in this inquiry.

Compensation

Participants will not be compensated for participating in the survey.

Alternatives to Study Participation

An alternative to this study is to not participate.

Confidentiality

The results of this research may be published or presented for scientific purposes. You will not be named in any reports of results. Your study records that have your identity in them may be shown to the PI, Institutional Review Board (IRB) (a committee that reviews and approves research studies, the Food and Drug Administration, or other governing agencies. This is to prove which study procedures you completed and to check these data reported about you. They may also review your records. The study team will keep all information about you confidential as provided by law, but complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

If you leave this study or are removed from the study, the study data collected before you left may still be used along with other data collected as part of the study. For purposes of follow-up studies and if any unexpected events happen, subjects identification will be filed at the office of Dr. Jennifer Friend, under appropriate security and with access limited to the research team only.

If you sign the consent form, you are allowing the study team and these other agencies to see your records.

The University of Missouri-Kansas City appreciates people who help it gain knowledge by being research studies. It is not the University's policy to pay for or provide medical treatment for persons who participate in studies. If you think you have been harmed because you were in this study, please call Dr. Jennifer Friend at 816 235-2550. If you have questions about the inquiry that you are participating in, please contact the study coordinator via phone or email:

Jimmie Bullard, M.Ed., Ed. D Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations and Curriculum & Instructional Leadership
Ph: 816 217-0991/ jdctz3@mail.umkc.edu

Contacts for Questions about the Study

You should contact the IRB of UMKC's Institutional Review Board at 816 235 5927 if you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call the researcher Dr. Jennifer Friend at 235-2550 if you have any questions about this study. You may also call her if any problems arise.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this inquiry is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. If you decide not to participate or withdraw from the inquiry, the principal investigator will retain the information already collected from the survey and interviews.

You have read this consent form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the survey, including risks and benefits. You may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Dr. Jennifer Friend at 235-2550.

APPENDIX E

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY WITH SIGNATURES

Consent for Participation in a Research Inquiry CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY THROUGH AN AFRICAN-CENTERED APPROACH IN A MIDWESTERN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Introduction

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study in Kansas City, Missouri. The researcher in charge of this study is Dr. Jennifer Friend. While she will run this study, other qualified persons who work with her may act for her. The study coordinator will be Jimmie Bullard, Doctoral Candidate-University of Missouri, Kansas City.

The research team is asking you to take part in this research study because you have met the following criteria: (a) number of years employed at the school equal to or greater than three years, (b) experience with using culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered education, and (c) the time period worked at the school between 2000 and 2006. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. The study coordinator will go over this form with you. Ask her to explain anything that you do not understand. This form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and beliefs, if any, if you consent to be in the study.

Background

This research inquiry, *Culturally Relevant Pedagogy through an African-centered Approach in a Midwestern Urban Elementary School*, is a quality inquiry proposed to examine data related to student achievement, specifically students that were taught using African-centered methods.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is: (1) to explore the experiences of teachers and other staff members who educated Black students in a Midwest urban elementary school, (2) to examine teachers' and other staff members' pedagogy as being culturally relevant using an African-centered method, and (3) to identify the strategies and/or best practices utilized by these teachers and other staff members that led to school outcomes that included meeting adequate yearly progress and improved student conduct.

The overarching Research Question for this study is: How did teachers and other staff members in one African-centered elementary school use culturally responsive pedagogy through African-centered methods to support high levels of academic achievement and social success for their students while working in the urban core within a district identified as failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)?

The findings will be shared through a research dissertation presented to the doctoral committee on behalf of the University of Missouri at Kansas City (UMKC).

You will be one of five subjects in the study from the Harambee Elementary School. Five subjects will take part in this study.

Study Procedures

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for eight weeks. Subjects will participate in (2) individual interview sessions with the study coordinator regarding culturally relevant pedagogy through African-centered Education that occurred at one Midwestern elementary school. The subjects will be asked to share personal experiences, interpret poetry, and share strategies and methods that were used during the research study. The interviews will be scheduled to last between 45 and 60 minutes at a time and location, that is convenient to the participant. A recording device will be used during the interviews. All recordings will remain confidential and secure.

Possible Risks or Side effects of Taking Part in this Study

There are psychological, emotional, social risks, and risk of loss of confidentiality involved with this study because you will be asked to recall personal experiences that may or may not be positive.

Possible Benefits for Taking Part in this Study

There are no direct benefits. Thee indirect benefit to society is that the personal experiences of the subjects could change urban education and increase student achievement in urban cities in the United States.

Fees and Expenses

There is no monetary cost to participate in this inquiry.

Compensation

Participants will not be compensated for participating in the inquiry.

Alternatives to Study Participation

An alternative is to not participate in the study.

Confidentiality

The results of this research may be published or presented for scientific purposes. You will not be named in any reports of results. Your study records that have your identity in them may be shown to the PI, Institutional Review Board (IRB) (a committee that reviews and approves research studies, the Food and Drug Administration, or other governing agencies. This is to prove which study procedures you completed and to check these data reported about you. They may also review your records. The study team will keep all information about you confidential as provided by law, but complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

If you leave this study or are removed from the study, the study data collected before you left may still be used along with other data collected as part of the study. For purposes of follow-up studies and if any unexpected events happen, subjects identification will be filed at the office of Dr. Jennifer Friend, under appropriate security and with access limited to the research team only.

If you sign the consent form, you are allowing the study team and these other agencies to see your records.

The University of Missouri-Kansas City appreciates people who help it gain knowledge by being research studies. It is not the University's policy to pay for or provide medical treatment for

persons who participate in studies. If you think you have been harmed because you were in this study, please call Dr. Jennifer Friend at 816 235-2550. If you have questions about the inquiry that you are participating in, please contact the study coordinator via phone or email:

Jimmie Bullard, M.Ed., Ed. D Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership, Policy & Foundations and Curriculum & Instructional Leadership
Ph: 816 217-0991/ jdctz3@mail.umkc.edu

Contacts for Questions about the Study

You should contact the IRB of UMKC's Institutional Review Board at 816 235 5927 if you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call the researcher Dr. Jennifer Friend at 235-2550 if you have any questions about this study. You may also call her if any problems arise.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this inquiry is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. If you decide not to participate or withdraw from the inquiry, the principal investigator will retain the information already collected from the survey and interviews.

You have read this consent form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including risks and benefits. You have had a chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Dr. Jennifer Friend at 235-2550. By signing this consent form, you volunteer and consent to take part in this study. The study staff will give you a copy of this consent form.

Authorizations

Signature (volunteer subject)

Date

Printed Name (volunteer subject)

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Printed name of Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

The opening statement for the first interview session will be as follows:

African-centered Education has been offered in this area for about 20 years. ACE promotes the culture of the student. I am conducting interviews with teachers and other staff members that have been successful using culturally responsive pedagogy through African-centered Education.

The information you provide in this interview will be strictly confidential and used only for gaining meaning related to the ACE. The interview will take between 45-60 minutes. The interview will tend to focus on your personal experiences that have contributed to your success using a culturally responsive pedagogy through African-centered education methods.

The interview questions will include:

1. How long did you teach at the Midwest elementary school?
2. What was your position?
3. Why did you decide to teach at the Midwest elementary school?
4. Describe your first year working at the school?
5. Can you share one or two of your most rewarding experiences?
6. Can you share one or two of your most challenging experiences?
7. What are some of the most important factors as it relates to best practices in your classroom at the Midwest elementary school? How did these practices affect the social and academic behaviors of your students?

8. How did you ensure that the culture of your students was embedded in your classroom practices?
9. Share a time when you felt most committed to the Midwest elementary school. Describe how that made you feel.
10. I would like to share a poem with you written by an Unknown Author titled “I Am Somebody”:

I Am Somebody

Author Unknown

I Am Somebody,

I May Not Look Like Everybody,

But I Am Somebody,

I Feel Like I Am Somebody,

I Look Like I Am Somebody,

I Act Like I Am Somebody,

Everybody is Somebody to Somebody,

Nobody but Nobody Can Make Me Feel Like A Nobody,

If You Want To Love Somebody Love Me,

If You Want To Help Somebody,

Then Help Me,

I Am Somebody,

And Don't You Ever Forget It!

What are some of your reactions to this poem as related to your work with African-centered education?

11. Please share anything that was not addressed in my interview questions that would help provide insight into the phenomenon of culturally relevant pedagogy using African-centered methods.

Thank you for your participation in this interview. For our second interview session, please bring a poem of your own to share during the interview. This could be a poem that you write yourself, or a poem that has significance to you as related to your work with African-centered education.

Second Interview:

The opening statement for the second interview session will be as follows:

African-centered Education has been offered in this area for about 20 years. ACE promotes the culture of the student. I am conducting a second interview with teachers and other staff members that have been successful using culturally responsive pedagogy through African-centered Education.

The information you provide in this interview will be strictly confidential and used only for gaining meaning related to the ACE. The interview will take between 45-60 minutes. The interview will tend to focus on your personal experiences that have contributed to your success using a culturally responsive pedagogy through African-centered education methods.

The interview questions will include:

1. What were some of the reasons that caused you to work at the Midwest elementary school?
2. What were some of the responsibilities of your position at the Midwest elementary school inquiry school?
3. What was happening in the school at the time you started to work there?
4. What was one of the most rewarding experiences you had at the school?
5. What was one of the most challenging experiences you had at the school?
6. Describe a lesson that was rich in culturally responsive pedagogy that the students really enjoyed. How did you know that they enjoyed the lesson? What did their social and academic behavior look like during the lesson?
7. What do you feel are the most important factors that contributed to academic success of the students at the inquiry school?
8. What do you feel are the most important factors that contributed to the positive social behavior of the students at the inquiry school? At this time, I would like to ask you to share the poem that you brought with you to the interview. What are some of your reactions to this poem as related to your work with African-centered education?
9. Here is a page from the school's yearbook. Please take a look at these photos and share what thoughts and feelings you have.
10. Please share anything that was not addressed in my interview questions that would help provide insight into the phenomenon of culturally relevant pedagogy using African-centered methods.

APPENDIX G
AFRICAN-CENTERED EDUCATION BLUEPRINT
FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
How to Start an Effective Culturally Relevant School
Using African-centered Methods

Step 1: Leadership—Find a Visionary Leader

The first step in developing an effective CRP through African-centered school model is recruiting and/or developing a strong 21st century leader that has the ability to plan and execute a vision with fidelity. My research findings suggest that a school leader that has the ability to lead by example and experience is an effective leader. Furthermore the research revealed that the leader must be proactive, firm, fair, reflective, and knowledgeable of how culture evokes meaning for students. The leader must set the tone and pace by executing a vision, goals, norms, and a purpose for being. The leader must lead by example, and sometimes from behind.

The leader believes in a shared leadership approach where all stakeholders have a voice and opinions. The leader share the goals and objectives of the school with the teachers, in turn, the teachers help create personal involvement for students and parents. The school leaders goal must be to turn all stakeholders into leaders to create a sense of ownership. My research findings publicized the fact that the school leader in my inquiry made all stakeholders feel a sense of importance and belonging.

Step 2: Staffing—Hire a committed staff

The next step in developing an African-centered school is selecting and training a highly qualified staff that believes in African-centered methods and is willing to acquire

the necessary training to ensure its success. My research findings revealed that most staff members that worked at the school were committed to and believed in the school's theme. They also employed many of the school's cultural beliefs and principles into their personal life. They believed that CRP was not only good for students, but also good for them. Several research participants' believed that African-centered education validated who they were personally and professionally.

I am sure you are wondering where you find teachers like the aforementioned ones. It is not an easy task, but it's possible. It begins through the hiring process. Potential employees must be informed of the expectations, the history, and methods that are required to be an effective teacher of CRP through African-centered methods. You must look beyond degrees and credentials to find the best candidates. You must ask tough questions about prospective candidates' experiences, affiliations and beliefs to weed out individuals that are just seeking employment (see Appendix H). By the end of the interview you should have a clear grasp concerning the candidates' potential for employment.

Step 3: Create a Sense of Urgency—Do your research!

In step four, share data. Find as much information you can regarding crime rates, teen pregnancy, low student achievement, achievement gaps, and dropout rates to inform the community. Based on my personal experiences and research findings parents are not adequately informed. Many educators believe that urban Black parents don't want to know what's going on in schools or the community, but I disagree. Communities don't know what they don't know. It is the school's job to provide as much information as

possible to the community, concerning the community. This should create a sense of urgency. If it doesn't, find more information, until it does.

Also share the research regarding CRP through African-centered methods and how it has improved the social and academic outcomes for many Black students living in the urban core of large cities. Share success stories, share challenges, allow stakeholders to ask questions, provide handout and pamphlets, websites, contact information. Allow the community to digest information before asking them to engage in dialogue. This will allow the community to make informed decisions regarding the school.

Step 4: Community Support—Solicit support from the community including students

The third step is to illicit community support through parents, students, community activist, ministers, and business owners. Based on my personal experiences you must solicit community support to be viable in the community. According to my research, when the community is involved in every aspect of development, the school's opportunities for success rise tremendously. There has to be a personal and cultural alignment between the school and the community. The community has to know you are in the business of centering the students in academic excellence.

How do you get the community involved? School leaders and staff must be willing to walk the community. They must go door to door to inform parents of the school's theme and invite them for their assistance in developing the vision and mission. The school has to make the parents and students feel like they are the experts and what they think, believe and feel, really matter. The staff has to visit and call local businesses and churches to inform them of the new school and invite them to be a part of the school.

The leader and teachers must be willing to collaborate with all the stakeholders. One of the respondents in my research stated that you have to allow parents to experience ACE by inviting them to participate in the school. This will communicate mutual respect and forge strong community school bonds.

Step 5: Cultivate a Mission and Vision Statement—Collaborate with stakeholders

In step five the leader must share their vision, purpose, objectives, and goals for the school with the community. Then allow the community to revise, reframe and develop a collective vision and mission statement for the school. My research suggest that developing a collective mission and vision statement creates buy-in from stakeholders. I have personally experienced this process and believe whole heartedly that it is not a step you want to skip. The community develop a sense of ownership and conglomerate.

The stakeholders will be more able to assist with the development of the vision and mission if you provide meaning and purpose. Make certain that your communication is clear and community friendly. Use checks and balance to confirm that stakeholders are attentive of what they are being asked to do. Be transparent. The more relevant and meaningful information you provide, the more valuable and personal the community involvement will become.

Step 6: School Culture-Collaborate to develop a school culture for success.

In step six, create a school environment with high academic and social expectations that the community can be proud of. You do this by providing a safe, clean building, inside and outside, and that the aesthetics of the building are pleasing to the eye. This may seem like a no brainer, but parents have more respect for things that look nice.

My research suggested that the building of my inquiry was always very clean and inviting. The staff and students used great customer service and were friendly from the moment guest entered the school. Based on my research findings celebrations and traditions that honored students' academic and social success was vital to the overall school's culture.

Introduce cultural traditions and celebration that will set the tone for the school's culture. Celebrations like Harambee (Pulling together) where all stakeholders came together, weekly, as a family to recite poems, sing songs, listen to drums, and dance contributed to the schools positive culture. My data suggest that these celebrations had a positive effect on student achievement and student discipline. The celebrations created a personal investment in the students and community and demonstrated the school was not just interested in test scores, but in the whole child.

Step 7: Curriculum and Professional Development—Don't start from scratch!

In the final step, discover and investigate available resources that have been effective in CRP through African-centered methods—then train your staff. Throughout my research findings the curriculum and professional development enabled the staff to teach with fidelity. Several participants suggested that there understanding of the curriculum was very important for student's overall success. The curriculum must be well organized, culturally relevant and user friendly. It also must be used in conjunction with state and district standards and objectives. The curriculum must be challenging and embodies the culture and the experiences of the students that you teach. It also must have a character development component to teach student about self-identity, cultural

awareness, and cultural identity. But beware, the curriculum in isolation will not improve student achievement. A well trained, committed staff is the key to its effectiveness.

The respondents in my research publicized that the curriculum was the framework and the professional development was the guide that led to understanding and high levels of academic achievements for students. The school of my inquiry invested a lot and time, training and resources preparing the staff to teach, before allowing them to get in front of the students. Based on my finding the professional training was a critical part of the successful that they gained on formative and summative assessments. One respondent stated the without the training she would have not been successful.

APPENDIX H

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

FOR EMPLOYMENT AT AN AFRICAN-CENTERED SCHOOL

1. What does African-centered Education mean to you?
2. Do you feel that “culture” is an important part of education?
3. Do you believe that all children can learn?
4. Are you willing to attend training and professional development activities to enhance your knowledge regarding African-centered education?
5. Listen to this proverb, and tell me what the first thing that comes to mind; “I am because you are, and you are because I am. I can’t be who I should be until you are who you should be. I am because you are and you are because I am.”
6. Have you ever worked in an urban school setting?
7. How do collaborate with school stakeholders?
8. What do you think about the achievement gap that exist between Black and White students?
9. What are you willing to do to gain a better understanding of African-centered education?
10. Are you certified to teach the grade you are applying for?

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Sage.

VITA

Mrs. Jimmie Bullard, native of Kansas City, Missouri, grew up living with her mother, Patricia Irene Looney, and five siblings. She attended Francis Willard Elementary school for grades K through 6th. She attended Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School for grades 7 and 8. She attended and graduated from Hickman Mills High School and Paseo High School in the late 1980s. After graduation, she entered the University of Missouri-Kansas City, Penn Valley Community College, and Longview Community College. Based on her desire to learn more about African history, she transferred to a culturally diverse college. She graduated from a historically black college, Lincoln University, in Jefferson City, Missouri.

After graduating from Lincoln University with a Bachelor's in Elementary Education and Master's in Guidance and Counseling, she was hired as an elementary school teacher at an African-centered school in Kansas City, Missouri. She worked as a classroom teacher in grades 2nd through 6th for 12 years. After her successful tenure as a teacher, she was encouraged to pursue a degree in Administration; therefore, she enrolled in William Woods University in 2007.

In 2009, she earned a degree in Elementary Administration. In July of that same year, she was named vice principal for the African-centered Sixth Grade Center. The following year, due to her hard work, determination, and perseverance, she was named middle school principal for grades 6th through 8th. She reduced the school discipline rate considerably by establishing meaningful relationships with her staff and students while implementing a culturally rich curriculum. Her students experienced academic growth in communication arts and mathematics according to state assessments. In May 2012, the

school where she worked was closed due to unresolved contract negotiations between the African-centered school's board and the board of the Kansas City, Missouri School District.

Currently, she is an instructional coach at a pre-K through 6th grade school in the Kansas City Public Schools. She provides professional development, mentoring, data analysis, classroom management strategies, and specialized training to the staff members and teachers at the school. In March 2014, she earned a certificate from the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) in the area of School Leadership upon the completion of a two-year training program.

Mrs. Bullard plans to continue her research in African-centered Education and to seek a leadership position in an urban school district or entity.